

**AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATOLOGY IN MAINSTREAM  
FILM THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF GENDER EQUITY  
CRITICAL ASSESSMENT**

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## **DECLARATION**

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## ABSTRACT

Gender inequity in the Hollywood film industry highlights the importance of continued feminist film discourse development and analysis. Female representation in film is also assessed through popular media tests in cyberfeminism such as the Bechdel Test as a measurable method of revealing gender inequity. The power dynamics between male and female protagonists result in hierarchical power plays which affect the agency of a female character's arc. The development of the Revised Mako Mori Test as an alternative popular media test shows the power distribution of the character arc of female characters in film. The analysis of three science fiction female characters namely Mako Mori (*Pacific Rim* 2013), Imperator Furiosa (*Mad Max: Fury Road* 2015), and Ellen Ripley (*Aliens* 1983), illustrated the impact of a strong narrative arc. The Revised Mako Mori Test indicated that, through the close proximity of a female character's arc to the narrative arc of the film, her agency is advanced. A strong female protagonist acts as a driving force of a film's narrative arc if her character arc is continuously developed with consideration of the film's plot. The Revised Mako Mori Test shows the relevance of assessing the character arc of a female protagonist and how it impacts on female representation in film.

**Keywords:** Gender equity, female representation, strong women, Cyberfeminism, Fourth-Wave feminism, online discourse, digital humanities, narratology, power theory, spectator theory, intersectionality, measurability, agency, subjectivity, the Bechdel Test, the Mako Mori Test, *Alien*, *Pacific Rim*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

## OPSOMMING

Geslagsongelykheid in Hollywood film onderstreep die belangrikheid van die voortdurende ontwikkeling en analise van feministiese film diskoers. Vroue verteenwoordiging in film word ook deur middel van populêre mediatoetse soos die Bechdel toets in die kuberruimte geassesseer. Die mags-dinamikas tussen mans en vroue protagoniste lei tot hiërargiese magspeling wat daarvolgens 'n effek op die agentskap van die vrou se karakterboog het. Die ontwikkeling van die Hersiene Mako Mori Toets as 'n alternatiewe populêre media toets wys die magsverspreiding van die vroue karakter se karakterboog in die film. Die analise van drie wetenskapsfiksie vroulike karakter, naamlik Mako Mori (*Pacific Rim* 2013), Imperator Furiosa (*Mad Max: Fury Road* 2015), en Ellen Ripley (*Aliens* 1983) illustreer die impak van 'n sterk karakterboog. Die Hersiene Mako Mori Toets dui, deur middel van die nabyheid van 'n vroue karakter se karakterboog tot die storielyn-boog, haar gevorderde agentskap aan. 'n Sterk vroue protagonist is die dryfkrag van 'n film se storielyn-boog sodra haar karakter voortdurend ontwikkel word met oorweging van die film se storielyn en komplot. Die Hersiene Mako Mori Toets wys die relevansie van die assessering van die karakterboog van 'n vroue protagonist en die impak op die verteenwoordiging van vroue in film.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Geslagsgelykheid, vroue verteenwoordiging, sterk vroue, Kuberfeminisme, Vierde-golf feminisme, aanlyn diskoers, digitale geesteswetenskappe, narratologie, magsteorie, toeskouerteorie, ras teorie (intersectionality), meetbaarheid, agentskap, subjektiwiteit, die Bechdel Toets, die Mako Mori Toets, *Alien*, *Pacific Rim*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXTUALISATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The analysis of the representation of female characters in Hollywood films has developed, undiminishingly, as a part of feminist gender studies from the early 1970s, and is still prevalent today. The development of online Fourth Wave feminism or cyberfeminism since approximately 1994 includes an array of gender assessments on the visibility of a female character in film and impacts on the dialogue around the strength of the female character. The assessment and dialogue relating to female character types, with reference to, for example, the term 'strong' female character in film, has, over this period, become increasingly normative in popular and online media. The relationship between male and female characters has also, as a component of this dialogue, been analysed in the context of the female character's substance, character development and strength as it in turn relates to the story, and her own character. The power and presence of female characters as they relate to male characters, whether dependently or independently, have furthermore been scrutinized through tests, diagrams and character-type identifications, to the extent that ample blogs, movements and organisations relating to this topic have become prominent, not only in academic research, but as part of the World Wide Web (www) or Internet, soon after its inception in 1989. The arguments presented in this dissertation are in part an exposition of the influence of the online sphere as a developmental platform for cyberfeminism and its role in the representation of female characters in film.

Donna Haraway (1990) refers to cyberfeminists in her article *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. She points to, and highlights, the possibilities of feminist networks in cyberspace as an effective form of communication and activism, with the primary utopian vision that cyberspace will allow for a gender equal platform. Haraway views this type of networking as a channel to empower women and bring about change in how women

communicate, and transform how they are represented and viewed in society. She also sees cyberspace as a means for women to “escape” modes of domesticity. Haraway (1990:292) states that cyber-women (cyborgs) are “No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household.” Women therefore can reach one another and actively participate in revolutionising the world, from a domestic setting, or elsewhere. It is also this social relation, not only women in relation to women, but also women in relation to men, that is relevant in the cyber-realm, as the disembodiment of cyberspace hypothetically should allow for a gender-free platform of communication and engagement. From a socio-political viewpoint, Western society’s women are not generally bound to their homes as they were in, for example, the late 19th- to mid-20th century. When discussing the relevance of cyberfeminism, could the reference to the cult of domesticity still be pertinent, and are there still underlying echoes that resonate with a 21st century Western society? Did the current representation of women in media and in film necessarily contribute to the efforts of gender equality of the past three feminist waves, or do we still read and experience the undercurrent of a cult of domesticity?

Discussions and assessments by cyberfeminists and the general public around female representation in film reveal power structures and struggles which are developed through popular online tests such as the Bechdel test. This test was originally and inadvertently created by Alison Bechdel<sup>1</sup> in a 1985 comic strip. The Bechdel test, a gender assessment which asks whether women are identified and visible in films (Adams 2013:n.p.), injects value into the framework of gender studies through a feminist lens, as it develops a pop-culture responsiveness around female representation. Additional tests such as the Mako Mori Test, created by a Tumblr blogger with the pseudonym Chaila (Romano 2013:n.p.) in 2013, is considered to be a supplementary gender media test which augments the questions raised by the Bechdel test. The three questions the Mako Mori Test asks is a) whether there is at

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Bechdel is a lesbian comic strip cartoonist who created the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983-2008). Her comic strip “became a countercultural institution among lesbians and discerning non-lesbians all over the planet” (Bechdel 2017: n.p.). She also published the graphic novel *Fun Home* in 2006, which was turned into a Broadway musical in 2015, and consequently won multiple Tonys. She also created another graphic novel *Are You My Mother?* and in 2014 was named a MacArthur Fellow (Biography 2015: n.p.).

least one female character who (b) gets her own narrative arc (c) that is not about supporting a man's story. As such a gender media test has not been developed, this thesis will, in part, look at the discourse of narratology with the purpose of developing an academically researched, popular gender media test.

Female representation assessments in visual media such as the Bechdel and Mako Mori tests had similar precursors in the early 1970s in the form of female type-identification. An example is Molly Haskell's (1974:60-62) identification of three types of female characters in her book *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. The scope of Haskell's identification of female characters ranges from the extraordinary woman (a woman who represents a strong, powerful character), the ordinary woman (a common, passive and often victimized woman) to the ordinary woman who becomes an extraordinary woman (women who are victims, but who survive victimisation). The identification of the strong or extraordinary female in film, or her absence through the presence of the ordinary woman as identified by Haskell (1974:60-62), have constantly been considered in the different analyses of how females are represented in film.

One could ask how the identification and discussion around the strong female character in film in the cyber-realm, as a component of Fourth Wave Feminism, are relevant to 21<sup>st</sup>-Century society. Have the First, Second and Third waves of feminism not adequately addressed gender equality and consequently brought sufficient change and awareness in Western society, and in doing so brought enough change for women in order for them not to pursue any more revolutionary action? For example, women have been brought into the workplace on an equal footing, or so society is led to believe. Hollywood, as the major film industry of a Western, first-world country, is still involved, for example, in contentious issues around equal pay for female actors. Jennifer Lawrence, a female actor with the highest net worth in Hollywood for 2015-16 (Robehmed 2017:n.p.), wrote an open letter, *Why Do I Make Less Than My Male Co-Stars?* (Lawrence 2015:n.p.), addressing the pay-gap issue as an example of gender inequality in 21<sup>st</sup> century Western society. Women are allowed to vote, raise their opinions vociferously and are at times represented as strong and confident, taking powerful leading roles and

often presented as super heroes. But, when it comes to compensation, female actors are still paid less than their male counterparts. Charlize Theron negotiated equal pay for her male counterpart, Chris Hemsworth, for the film *The Huntsman* in 2015. As Theron (Lewis 2015:n.p.) commented:

I have to give them credit because once I asked, they said “yes”, she says. They did not fight it. And maybe that’s the message: That we just need to put our foot down. This is a good time for us to bring this to a place of fairness, and girls need to know that being a feminist is a good thing. It doesn’t mean that you hate men. It means equal rights. If you’re doing the same job, you should be compensated and treated in the same way.

The need for gender equity is thus still a current issue in Hollywood, not only on screen, but at the foundations of the film industry.

On 21 January 2017, a day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, Charlize Theron, together with a vast array of other Hollywood female celebrities, joined approximately 4.6 million women (Friedersdorf 2017:n.p.) as they marched across the United States of America and elsewhere across the world, in reaction to his presidency. Chenoweth (2017) described the march as the biggest in the history of the United States of America. The Women’s March, one of the largest marches of its kind, was initiated on Facebook by Teresa Shook, as a response to Trump’s misogynous comments about women, where he brags about grabbing women “by the pussy” without permission, calling his daughter “a piece of ass” and standing accused of sexual assault by multiple women (Friedersdorf 2017:n.p.). The Women’s March is, thus, the antithesis of reverence towards his position as the most recent leader of the Western “free world”, instead inciting indignation from women across America, and the world. Shook’s Facebook event produced a march which proliferated into a network of response.

The banners and posters of women participating in the Women’s March were significant, and various institutions and museums across the world, such as the Bishopsgate Institute in London, The Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History and the Newberry Library in Chicago, noted them as valuable historical artifacts (Zillman 2017:n.p.). The messages on the posters varied, with some



declaring, “My pussy, my choice”, “Girls just wanna have Fun-damental rights”, and “Here’s to strong women: may we know them; may we be them; may we raise them.” The Amplifier Foundation, as an example of foundation involvement through a call for art prior to the march, received five thousand poster entries which could be downloaded (398 452 posters were downloaded). They distributed 135,500 posters (The Amplifier Foundation.org 2017:n.p.) on the day of the Women’s March. Two of the posters selected for the Amplifier Foundation read, “I am an object” and “The Future is now, and its Female”. It is evident that the selection and consequent election of a misogynous man (Donald Trump) as the president of one of the Western world’s allegedly most democratic countries, in the year 2017, caused a widespread response of incredulity. The recent USA presidency election results indicate that the feminist movement is not obsolete, and that cyberfeminism has an indispensable function in the current socio-political climate. Cyberfeminism has shown the necessary power to raise world-wide awareness and advocate transformation as to how women are treated. It can consequently also support the empowerment and representation of women in 21st century Western politics, media and film. As Donna Haraway (1991:29) states:

In the traditions of ‘Western’ science and politics – the tradition of racist, male dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress, the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture, the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.

Cyberfeminism is, from Haraway’s standpoint, a call to arms for those with body politics, female representation and socio-feminist concerns. The Internet is a place where the merging of physical bodies and cyberspace allow for a new form of activism.

However, although cyberfeminism is a means to address equal rights and an equal work environment, the movement also raises concerns in terms of the position feminism assumes in the context of cyber-space. Hinsey (2013:29), for example, questions the focus of the Internet as a platform for entertainment, opinion, and pop-culture, rather than a place of academic research and discourse. This focus is

responsible for creating instead a form of anti-intellectualism, which aims rather for instant gratification and popularity than academic feminist discourse. However, Danielle Henderson's blog (2011:n.p.) *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, is merely one example of how academic research and feminist literary theory can merge with the pop-culture phenomena of cyberspace, allowing for both intellectual discourse and popular culture to become a valued hybridisation for both public and academic consideration. This thesis will in part address the issues around anti-intellectualism in cyberspace, and look at the fusion of pop-culture with academic research and feminist discourse in cyberspace as a potential landscape for feminist production, reproduction and imagination.

One can assume that the first three feminist waves have achieved an adequate groundwork for women – enough not to be concerned with expanding into cyberspace as a revolutionary platform. And that Hollywood would have garnered sufficient understanding of gender equality and female agency through the revolutionary work of the past three feminist waves. However, looking at recent studies from various institutions and universities, such as the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, The Harnisch Foundation (USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism), Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film (San Diego State University), #FemFuture: Online Revolution, as well as websites such as Geek Feminism, it is evident that female representation in Hollywood does not equate to gender equality, and still faces a continuous need for transformation. Commentary such as that of President Donald Trump, where he was taped “bragging about using his fame to try and ‘fuck’ women and groping them without waiting for their consent” (Jacobs & Siddiqui 2016:n.p.), could, if not addressed and left unchallenged, surge into societal consciousness as normative behaviour towards women. Cyberfeminism has, to date, revealed a compelling network of communication and dialogue to address such public misogyny through various forums. It is consequently having a powerful impact on how women are positioned in Western society, as well as internationally.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the context above, the following questions arise:

- ☐ Does 21<sup>st</sup> Century representation of women in film and media reflect the collective efforts of the first three feminist waves in terms of gender equality?
- ☐ Is Cyberfeminism (Fourth Wave Feminism) currently relevant and effective in establishing and developing gender equality in society and Western film?
- ☐ What is the relevance of cyber (online) gender tests such as the Bechdel- and Mako Mori Tests in establishing gender equality, in particular as they relate to a female character's narrative arc?
- ☐ Does the term "strong female character", when considering the Mako Mori Test, represent women appropriately in a context of gender equity?

## 1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This dissertation aims to:

- ☐ Investigate the effectiveness and use of cyberfeminism as online discourse to develop the conversation around the representation of female characters in film.
- ☐ Develop the revised Mako Mori Test as an online popular media test which functions as a measurable directive to assess the strength and agency of the character arc of a female character in film.
- ☐ Determine how the narrative arc of a film is a site of power relations, and how it functions as a narratological platform which reveals the degree of agency a female character has in a film.
- ☐ Discuss spectator theory in the context of cyberfeminism and how public participation in popular online tests such as the Revised Mako Mori Test can develop online feminist discourse.

## 1.4 THESIS STATEMENT

This thesis will explore the manner in which cyberfeminism influences the conversation and the representation of female characters in film, with reference to the Mako Mori Test. The initial development and revision of the Mako Mori Test will examine and assess the narrative arcs of three selected post-apocalyptic strong female characters in terms of their agency and relations to the male protagonists in the films. There will be references to Bal's narratology theory, Lanser's feminist narratology theory, Foucault's power theory, and cyberfeminism as discourse, in order to establish how a female character's narrative arc is developed and represented in film.

The dissertation will demonstrate that a strong science fiction horror character, such as Ellen Ripley in *Aliens*, lays a foundation for strong female character arcs. The study will explore the narrative arc of Mako Mori in *Pacific Rim* and her role as the origin of the Mako Mori Test. Her intersectional relevance in the development of this test will be considered and discussed. Mako Mori, as an applicable intersectional female character, opens up the possibility of developing the online Mako Mori test as a response to the shortcomings of the established gender media test, the Bechdel Test. The Mako Mori Test underlines the importance of an independent and influential female narrative arc. The discussion around Imperator Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road* will argue that a strong female character narrative arc, irrespective of her abject and initially submissive position in the context of a post-apocalyptic male order, can dominate and develop the film's story arc.

The female characters in all three of these science fiction films show how a strong female narrative arc develops the film's story arc outside an established, settled patriarchal system. In other words, the fantastical aspects of the science fiction settings explore the relation of male and female protagonists in a potentially "neutral" setting, although echoes of a patriarchal system are still evident. The three selected films show a previously failed patriarchal system attempting to survive in an antagonistic climate of external dangers. The outside threats include attacks from aliens and Kaijus, as well as a lack of resources such as water, oil and evolutionary terrain. These factors are cause for the dynamics of war, and new

structures of power, control and agency. Within these science fiction landscapes the strong female characters are given agency and strong narrative arcs, which will be assessed through the development and revision of the Mako Mori test.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

This thesis will consist largely of an analysis of the character arcs of strong female protagonists in a fantasy science fiction genre, and assessed in context of the power relations with their male protagonist counterparts. The three films were selected as they comprise of strong female characters in various science fiction settings, and showcase self-determining character arcs. The female characters demonstrate agency, and drive the story arc through their individual character arcs. The analysis of their character arcs is underpinned by subject and power theory. At the same time the study will use theories such as feminist narratology, cyberfeminism and Foucauldian power theory to conduct the analysis. The dissertation will specifically explore the character arc of each female character and what the arc, directly and indirectly, communicates to the spectator. Evidence of the female protagonists' agency and power, and the substance of the characters in the film, will be shown through the development and revision of the Mako Mori Test. This thesis is approached from a qualitative explorative research methodology with reference to a feminist film theory framework. The predominant focus will be on the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test as an assessment of three female character arcs and power relations with the male protagonists' characters in the consecutive films.

The study will also use spectator theory and refer to intersectionality, together with a discussion of fragmented patriarchy in science fiction landscapes as the setting against which these female characters actively function.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL EXPOSITION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter constitutes a theoretical exposition of the key terms and theories used to analyse female protagonists' character arcs in three selected science fiction mainstream Hollywood films. The chapter functions to prevent repetition within the different chapters. The following exposition is done against the background of cyberfeminism, and contains a brief overview of science fiction as an alternative gender equity platform. A discussion of measurability and power relations, as observed through online popular media tests, is included. It also includes a brief overview of spectator theory and how public participation influences online popular media tests, and gender equity awareness. Additionally, each exploratory chapter will have an overview of supporting theories that underpin the examination of the selected female protagonists' character arcs. These theories are pertinent to the assessment of the films through analysis and the development of the Revised Mako Mori test.

The main concepts to be defined and discussed in this chapter relate to the representation of the female character arc, and the power relations embedded in the narrative arc of the film. It discusses the female character's arc in her power relations to the male protagonist's character arc, as well as her proximity to the narrative arc. The discussion thus looks at the power relation between the narrative arc of a film and the character arc of a female protagonist. It assumes that this proximity necessarily influences female agency, rather than a male-female binary power relation. Further reference is made to the spectator's gaze (public participation) in online discourse (cyberfeminism). These elements are the wide-ranging analytical tools which are employed to examine the respective female character arcs from a critical standpoint. It also supports the discussions around popular online media tests as a measure of gender equity in Hollywood films.

The Mako Mori Test, as a popular online media test, stems from the female character Mako Mori in *Pacific Rim* (2013) as a response to the gender equity deficiencies of the Bechdel Test. This character, however, failed the Bechdel Test, which caused pronounced dissatisfaction from the character's fan base. Chaila (Geek Feminism Wiki 2013:n.p.) suggests the Mako Mori Test as a prospective solution to circumvent the gender equity failures of the Bechdel Test. The premise of her suggestion is anchored in a required and independent narrative arc for the female character. Mako Mori's flaw as a female character, according to the Bechdel Test, relates to the fact that she is an identified but singular female, which excludes dialogue between two females (a Bechdel Test requirement). The Mako Mori Test rectifies this discrepancy through an emphasis on the development of a female character arc. The necessity of a dialogue between two identified females is consequently made redundant. Mako Mori as a female character becomes pivotal to gender equity in the film for two primary reasons: the fact that the film *Pacific Rim* failed her in relation to the Bechdel Test and her role as an intersectional role model. This consequently evoked active online spectator discussions, and public participation in the development of gender equity tests.

The discussion of gender equity through a selection of science fiction film protagonists takes place as part of online feminist discourse. The three science fiction films, namely *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Aliens* (1986), have strong female characters in common. These science fiction subgenres (post-apocalyptic, fantasy science fiction, and horror science fiction) have been explored by feminists as terrains which function as prospective sites of gender equity, neutrality and agency. Science fiction, furthermore, functions as a genre which offers a societal construct that serves as gender equal or genderless utopias. Alderman (2017:n.p.) refers to the fact that alternative societies or platforms such as feminist science fiction function as a contrary approach. This genre performs as a similitude, in that feminist science fiction as a genre asks questions around gender constructs. Feminist science fiction therefore serves as an alternative construct in considering utopian or dystopian societies. In her discussion around gender equity, Alderman (2017:n.p.) considers the relevance of the dystopian by asking:

...how much of what we think now, today, in generic western culture about men and women is innate in the human species and how much is just invented. And if we've

invented it then could we, for better or worse, invent it differently? The answers are often dystopian.

Alderman (2017:n.p.) adds that “utopias and dystopias can exist side by side, even in the same moment”. A parallel existence compellingly warrants the search for a new frontier for feminist discourse. It can take place through online discourse, and discussion of the selected science fiction, with either dystopian or utopian results. This relates to feminist goals which endeavour to, but fail, to attain “utopian” objectives, resulting in systemic dystopias. According to the cyberfeminists in the VNS Matrix (1991:n.p.), the search for a feminist utopia aims “to disrupt society’s patriarchal norms”. Two prominent cyberfeminist manifestos supporting this objective include Donna Haraway’s *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (1991), and the VNS Matrix’s *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1991). A more recent cyberfeminist manifesto, namely *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* (2015) by the Laboria Cuboniks, serves as further promotion of online discourse as a utopian solution.

These manifestos act as landmarks in online discourse, anchoring cyberfeminism in public declarations which transform in unison with ongoing online feminism. Basset’s (1999) *Manifesto against Manifestos* does, however, contrary to previous manifestos, query the goals of previous cyberfeminist manifestos. Basset’s manifesto probes online feminist manifestos as effective landmarks for utopian objectives. *Manifesto against Manifestos* (1999) subsequently keeps the relevance of the underpinning factors which drives cyberfeminism in check. Critical assessment in the form of cyberfeminist manifestos is, however, still relevant as a functional evaluation of the measurability and purpose of online discourse.

The significance of measurability and goal-orientation in feminism is highlighted by feminists such as Camille Paglia (2017:n.p.). Paglia criticizes 21<sup>st</sup> century feminism that embraces senseless radicalism and nit-picking rather than dealing with



intersectionality, and cross-cultural feminism<sup>2</sup>. Other measurable goals include relevant female representation in Western Hollywood films. Although strong female agency in Hollywood is progressing, ample gender equity transformation is still required in the film industry. Since feminism is a multi-faceted discourse, opposed to a singular thread, focalised goals may be difficult, but necessary to pinpoint and attain. Paglia (2017) considers that cyberfeminism and female representation in film require continuous scrutiny to achieve purposeful, goal-orientated gender equity results. Gender power relations in film are a focal component as they relate to both the structure of the narrative arc in film, and cyberfeminist discourse. Both these components become comingled topics in online discourse.

The narrative arc of a film as a site of power is discussed in narratology and power discourse as an influence on the development, transformation and agency of a character. It questions how power encompasses the development of a character's agency – a character which acts as a subject, and demonstrates agency, showing a power shift in her character arc. This in turn affects the narrative arc of the entire film, driving the action of the plot. Female character arc development in the narrative arc should, in part, be defined through a focus on wherever her power lies in the film's narrative arc. This is necessary since characters are largely shaped through their relation and conflict to and with one another in the plot.

Foucault emphasises power relations as pertinent to the development of subjectivity. Foucault (1982:410), (1985:83), states that “power is relations, power is not a thing, and it is a relationship between two individuals... What I mean by power relations is that we are in a strategic situation towards each other.” He reinforces this strategic situation of power by stating that:

Power relations include two elements: “that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person

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<sup>2</sup> Paglia, C. 14 April 2016. YouTube. *Camille Paglia talks with Ella Whelan about Feminism*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch>. Paglia, C. 22 March 2017. Ed Mays Pirate Television. The Seattle Public Library Foundation. *Camille Paglia on Free Women, Free Men: Sex, Gender, Feminism*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-9SrfYKGow>

who acts: and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.

Foucault (Interview *The Subject and Power* 1982:200)

Foucault's power theory underpins the theoretical analysis of the Revised Mako Mori Test, in which the female protagonist is unavoidably in a relation with the male protagonist or other male characters. She is also in a proximity and relation with the narrative arc of the film. The selection of these three strong female protagonists of a science fiction genre is an exacting choice. The three female characters highlight a relation to the narrative arc as power base through their effort towards agency in a world where former patriarchal institutional structures have collapsed. Yet, these structures are often in the process of being resurrected by men who survived, thus optimising the challenge of agency for the selected female characters. The shift of power is thus often upheld by agents of the preceding, disrupted patriarchy, adding further tension and play to the power relations between male and female protagonists in the selected films.

The three selected mainstream Western films show strong, active female characters in science fiction settings as a plausible gender-neutral platform of power relations between female and male protagonists. The films show these female protagonists as the potential driving force for the development of the narrative arc through their individual character arcs and agency. Their characters also shows strong individuality, having characteristics traditionally regarded as "male". This includes rationality, leadership, assertiveness, combat skills, physical dexterity, analytical cognitive skills and the strategic improvisation to destroy aliens, kaiju and tyrants. The performativity of gender, as discussed by Butler, is not the principal focus of this thesis, as the narrative, and character arc development of these female protagonists are the subject of analysis. However, as Butler (2009:i) states, the relation of gender performativity to power and agency is recognised, as "gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power". Gender performativity as it relates to power is therefore succinctly considered.

Laura Mulvey's (1989) writing on audience response and spectatorship is relevant to this dissertation in terms of public viewing and participation. The spectator's character observations and consequent analysis of films, transmute into populating online media test sites. This adds a further measurement and participation to "pleasurable looking". Mulvey (1989:17) states that "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect". Pleasurable looking does not merely relate to the male gaze, but includes the female gaze. Female protagonists in film fulfil character arcs and audiences give online testimonials in relation to their response to these strong female characters. These testimonials act as a form of self-recognition, thus allowing the mirroring of a "narcissistic" and reflective experience. The development of popular online media tests thus allow public participation on an auxiliary level, as pleasurable looking extends towards critical gender observation. This public participation results in an all-inclusive awareness on account of the measurable gender equity awareness.

## **2.2 CYBERFEMINISM AS ONLINE DISCOURSE**

### **2.2.1 Why Cyberfeminism?**

The question "Why Cyberfeminism?" is deliberated through a brief overview of some contextual terminology relating to cyberfeminism, together with a discussion of three areas of cyberfeminism which respond to key characteristics. The considered characteristics include the destabilisation of the phallogentric notion that technology is a male-invented system only, with none-to-marginal space for women. The augmented reach of feminist activism through cyberspace with connectivity and networking as a communicative solution is similarly deliberated. Lastly, the corporeal liberation of women into a "bodiless" cyberspace through the perception that gender binaries are able to hypothetically dissipate to establish a form of gender equity, is discussed.

### ***Contextualisation of cyberfeminism***

The origin of some terminology related to “cyberfeminism” assists in understanding the context in which cyberfeminism originated and in which it currently functions. With the development of the Internet and the release of the specifications for the World Wide Web in 1992 by Tim Berners-Lee (Norman 2005:6), the online social medium we call ‘cyberspace’ today was created.

The term “cyberspace” was created by William Gibson in 1982, in anticipation of the new electronic world of the Internet (Norman 2005:6). It described the virtual reality that would become the platform for cyberfeminism to operate from. Gibson, an American-Canadian writer, coined the word “cyberspace” in his story “Burning Chrome” published in *Omni* magazine. Approximately twelve years later, in 1994, the term ‘Cyberfeminism’ was created by Sadie Plant. Plant, the director of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick in Britain, created this term in order to “describe the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing, and exploiting the Internet, cyberspace, and new-media technologies in general” (Consalvo 2012:n.p.). The VNS Matrix, an Australian-based group of media artists, on the other hand, were responsible for the development and original use of the term “cyberfeminism” (Hawthorne & Klein 1999:2), still used in online feminist discourse.

Although cyberfeminists have the Internet as a platform in common, cyberfeminism as a designation has not been easily defined as a singular and focalised term. Munro (2013:22) points out that

contemporary feminism is characterised by its diversity of purpose, and amid the cacophony of voices it is easy to overlook one of the main constants within the movement as it currently stands – its reliance on the internet.

The diverse objectives of the movement within the construct of the Internet consequently permits the dissimilar online discourse, which characterises cyberfeminism. Cyberspace allows for a multifaceted expression of cyberfeminism without a distinct definition of what the movement should entail, thus providing a prospect multidimensional expansion of online discourse.

### ***Destabilisation of an androcentric cyberspace***

The subversion from an androcentric cyberspace became one of the significant points of cyberfeminism, so rising up against the phallogocentrism of the Internet as a technical networking platform. Paniagua (2012:252) stipulates that “the objective of the VNS Matrix was to subvert the androcentric all together [through] activities on the Internet and [they] looked for a representation of women as strong and active as men.”

In a seemingly contradictory statement in the “100 anti-theses on cyberfeminism” by Old Boys Network, the first international Cyberfeminist alliance which was founded in Berlin in 1997 (e-flux conversations 2015:n.p.), it states that “cyberfeminism is not anti-male”; however the anti-theses, if read in reverse as intended (as the title suggests), indirectly states that “cyberfeminism is not pro-male”. Prior to the presence of cyberfeminism in technology, it was regarded as a male domain. Consalvo (2012:n.p.) reiterates that “technology has been positioned as part of masculine culture – something that men are interested in, good at, and therefore engage in more than women.”

Sadie Plant (1997:18) counters this argument by commanding the presence of women such as Ada Lovelace and Joseph Marie Jacquard, a French engineer, from the archives. Plant reiterates that women have, in fact, historically contributed to the development of the machinery, and are intrinsically part of the development of technology. Women therefore have license to take ownership and cultivate feminist online discourse, as the world of technology is also their terrain. To be a ‘Cyborg feminist’ (a sub-term of cyberfeminism relating to Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*), furthermore supports the orientation of cyberspace as a female space. Paniagua (2012:248) here refers to “a specific branch of feminism in which women’s use of the new technologies would be profitable for them in their fight against patriarchy”.

The interruption of the Internet as an apparently patriarchal space was thus a foundational purpose of Cyberfeminism from the onset of the World Wide Web. A strong female representation in cyberspace was required and came to be known as cyberfeminism.

### ***Networking and connectivity***

Another impetus for the existence of cyberfeminism lies in the capacity for activism, connectivity and the communicative networking prospects through the Internet. Cyberfeminism infiltrates the network through connective activism, interrupting the hierarchy of gender separation and inequity. Wilding (1998:50) reiterates the necessity of cyberfeminist connectivity by insisting that “cyberspace does not exist in a vacuum; it is intimately connected to numerous real-world institutions and systems that thrive on gender separation and hierarchy”. Hawthorne & Klein (1999:5) posit that “connectivity is at the heart of feminism” and elaborates by stating that

Every campaign feminists have ever thought of, is present on the Internet. From what to do and who to contact for help in the case of sexual assault, to networks of women living in remote areas, to campaigns about education or violence, to networks of lesbians, Women’s Studies scholars, women’s organisations, environmentalists; and the possibilities are endless. (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999:7)

Connectivity is a powerful means of advancing the reach of individual and institutional cyberfeminism. Feminism’s functions in cyberspace as a networking construct in turn augments feminist activism. Activism through the internet, however, has dissimilar characteristics in comparison to first-, second- and third wave feminism which, for example, brought women together in cohesive physical demonstrations. Elm and Sundén (2007:7) note that “this activist version of cyberfeminism is not a unified, collective movement, which lends itself to straightforward comparison with earlier women’s movements.” The activism of cyberfeminism can, in contrast to previous feminist waves, function beyond the corporeal, but nevertheless does not exclude physical activism. The Women’s March, for example, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2017 corroborates this, as 440,000 to 500,000 people were drawn to marches across America and internationally.

Connectivity through cyberfeminism is presented through online discourse and awareness campaigns, and can consequently translate into physical activism such as marches and rallies.

### ***A bodiless cyberspace***

Cyberspace as a “bodiless” or incorporeal space is a utopian possibility for feminism and shows egalitarian prospects as it communicates the principle of disembodiment. The concept of a “bodiless” space calls for a form of gender equity, though the lure of disembodiment in cyberspace, can be problematic in its apparent simplicity. It is relevant in the context of assessments of Hollywood films, as women voice their perspectives and reception of female protagonists online.

A non-physiological view, or alternative disembodiment, is countered by an earlier understanding that feminists would benefit from this “bodiless” space as supportive of gender equality. Paniagua (2012:252) mentions cyberfeminists who support this bodiless space, and who claim that “the differences between men and women have been biological. VNS Matrix found their place in technology, where identity does not rely on the body, but on abstract thought.”

The concept of disembodiment is a promising feature of cyberfeminism, but there is a cyberfeminism which does not align with the concept of an incorporeal cyberspace, but rather with a corporeal embodiment as an inescapable reality. Disembodiment is a utopian aspiration of gender equity, but as Grosz (2001:19) states, “there are no utopian spaces anywhere except in the imagination”. Amanda du Preez (2009:xi), an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria, discusses cyberfeminist discourse which supports the principle of disembodiment in comparison to the “embodied material perspective” in her writing. Du Preez (2009:xi) further acknowledges that her work instead relates to

a particular cyberfeminist standpoint, which assumes that, although embodiment is in constant flux, it remains the invariable nexus from where new technologies are engaged.

Dr. Jessica Brophy (2010:929), an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Bridgewater College, USA, refers to the undertakings of the principle of disembodiment as a “cyberutopia” and prefers to advocate “a version of cyberfeminism that rejects ‘leaving the body behind’ while simultaneously rejecting a cyberfeminism based on viewing the medium as a simple extension of the body”.



The discourse on technology and disembodiment has opened up cyberfeminist theory which looks at how women interact online, and how corporeal utopias and dystopias affect communication in the context of gender equity and intersectionality.

Cyberfeminism allows for the continuation of feminist waves on a more technologically advanced platform, providing for the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist discourse. Cyberfeminism also offers a cyber-environment where global networking and connectivity are generated through, as what some theorists would refer to, as disembodiment or an incorporeal veracity. This permits a hypothetical form of egalitarian opportunities and voice through the blogosphere. In its multi-faceted display of discourse, cyberfeminism is therefore a relevant movement for online assessments and activism around gender equity.

### **2.2.2 A Brief Overview of the Historical Context of Cyberfeminism**

Cyberfeminism is frequently regarded as the fourth-wave of feminism, or otherwise seen as a foundational component of fourth-wave feminism, and emanates from third-wave feminism through its collaboration with cyberspace technology (Munro 2013). The preceding feminist waves have not had the considerable networking development of the Internet which fourth-wave feminism has experienced. The internet initially allowed for a broad spectrum of discourse expansion, which in turn was cause for complex assessment as to its parameters. The constraints of fourth-wave feminism are, likewise, contested and have not been given a defined time frame or conclusive assessment as, for example, first- and second-wave feminism have received. It is useful to contemplate cyberfeminism as either the whole of fourth-wave feminism, or a significant constituent of it.

The exact timelines of feminist waves are not precisely clear as the estimates shift, depending on delineation agreements and the discourse content that each wave demands. Estimates and delineations of feminist waves are also affected by agreement and variance of opinion on whether a wave in fact exists, as in the case of fourth-wave feminism. According to Baumgardner (2011:n.p.), first-wave feminism started during the period 1840 to 1920 (Laughlin et al. (2010:76). Munro (2013:22-23) broadly describes the first-wave as highlighting property ownership, suffrage and women's inequalities. Laughlin et al. (2010:76) describe the first-wave



as a movement for civil and political rights, such as property ownership and suffrage, dating from the first women's rights convention in the United States" and "granting women the right to vote".

Laughlin et al. (2010:76) and Baumgardner (2011:n.p.) estimate that second-wave feminism stretched from approximately 1960/ mid-1960 to mid-1980/ 1988. Munro (2013:22-23) describes the second-wave as underlining that 'the personal is political', thus reiterating the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women's private lives. Laughlin et al. (2010:76-77) describe the second wave as a resurgence of activism that broadened the notion of equality to include a re-examination of men's and women's social roles, and ending in the mid-1980s amid criticism, most notably from women of color and lesbians, that asserted that privileged, white heterosexual women determined second-wave goals, ideologies, and strategies.

Third-wave feminism, according to Baumgardner (2010:n.p.), stretched from 1988 to 2010, whereas Laughlin et al. (2010:77) suggest an approximate starting date of the mid-1980s. Laughlin et al. question the existence of a third-wave feminism conclusion, and consequently make no mention of the origins of fourth-wave feminism whatsoever. Baumgardner (2010:n.p.) considers the timeline of third-wave feminism to be from 1988-2010, with an acknowledgement of fourth-wave feminism which commenced from approximately 2008 onwards. Munro (2013:22-23) describes the third wave as a wave which dealt with academic investigation into queer theory and the fluidity of gender and sexuality, as well as individual emancipation. Laughlin et al (2010:77), on the other hand, states that the third wave "describes efforts by younger women and men to take feminism from what they perceived as an exclusive concern with dichotomous notions of gender toward consideration of the multiple identities of age, class, race, and sexual preference".

Munro (2013:23), in demarcating fourth-wave feminism, states that "the internet itself has enabled a shift from 'Third-wave' to 'Fourth-wave' feminism". Munro, (2013:23), however adds that, contrary to this shift, "the existence of a feminist 'Fourth-wave' has been challenged by those who maintain that increased usage of

the internet is not enough to delineate a new era.” Irrespective of this, the use of the Internet has influenced the identification of fourth-wave feminism and its placement in the wave-metaphor of the feminist movement. Baumgardner (2011:n.p.) regards fourth-wave feminism’s deployment of social media as a transformation of politics and feminism. The factors around the contextual and technological influences of fourth-wave feminism (Cyberfeminism) has thus decisively affected feminism as it is practised in contemporary online discourse today.

Although the fourth-wave has a debatable existence for some, the actuality of cyberfeminism as a component of fourth-wave feminism, irrespectively, allows for the transformation and activism of gender equity and politics in online discourse. Cyberfeminism as a fourth-wave component thus consequently plays an active role in a contemporary gender-transformation context which operates from the historical results of previous feminist waves, thus performing a relevant function throughout a timeline of approximately one-hundred-and-eighty years of feminist activism.

### **2.2.3 Cyberfeminism as an Online Discourse Today**

#### ***An anarchic characteristic***

Cyberfeminism is not a discourse with one measurable goal, but rather a broad network which labours towards the diverse but nonetheless similar objective of gender equity. This networking process can be regarded as an embryonic development of the movement through the use of a moderately new and ever-changing technological medium.

The movement also shows a growth concentration which is facilitated through the unstructured population of the internet. Wilding et al. (1997:47) previously stated two decades ago that “cyberfeminist incursion into various technoworlds (CD-ROM production, Web works, listservs and news groups, artificial intelligence, etc.) has been largely nomadic, spontaneous, and anarchic.” These drifting characteristics of cyberfeminism still hold true to this day, allowing for diverse platforms of gender equity, activism, self-presentation and research which are being developed and managed by a variety of online users. Sollfrank (1998:n.p.), a pioneering cyberfeminist artist in the 1990s, states in her online article *The Truth about*

*Feminism*, that cyberfeminism as an online discourse has been appropriated in many novel and idiosyncratic ways. She points out that the feminist efforts of the 1980s and 1990s have been expressed in less overt forms in comparison to the preceding feminist discourse. This was due to “New forms of subject-constitution, new distributions of competence regarding new technologies, new infiltrations of power configurations, and new forms of discourse which are established”.

Cyberfeminism as an online discourse manages characteristically to embrace speedily renewed and nuanced viewpoints which were non-existent prior to the development of the Internet. This immediacy includes a receptive approach to online discourse, or as Sollfrank (n.d. n.p.) claims, a renewed approach towards the “myth of political identity without forcing anyone to strive for it.” In other words, it is an approach which recognises an anarchic incursion, according to Wilding et al (1997:47). This approach furthermore includes a wider, and multi-faceted viewpoint of a cyberfeminist political identity with no forced or organised plan to realise a singular end results. An inclusive, flexible approach is nevertheless sought as a progression from the initial issues identified by earlier cyberfeminists, so as to advance online discourse delineation and development.

The process of delineating cyberfeminist discourse requires the reflective acknowledgment of issues which were regarded as significantly problematic at the onset of cyberfeminism during the 1990s. Carstensen (2009:106) asserts that these issues included the Internet as a male domain, a striving for solidarity between women online, the creation of utopian projects beyond binary gender relations, and the dynamics and meaning of bodiless interaction. Carstensen (2009:109-111) consequently highlights a cyberfeminist discourse which has progressively evolved away from the original issues encountered. Cyberfeminist discourse has, accordingly, seen the meaningful development of innovative projects and continued discourse. This includes, but is not limited to queer-feminist projects, the struggle towards the meaning of gender in larger and less isolated communities, and the witnessing of online subjects who participate in self-governance and self-management. Cyberfeminist discourse therefore shows, inasmuch as it is a broad and organic movement, progressive development on innumerable platforms and

shows more specific outcomes, if compared to issues highlighted at the onset of cyberfeminism in the early 1990s.

### ***Cyberfeminist manifestos as online discourse landmarks***

A number of cyberfeminist manifestos function as landmarks in following the advancement of this movement and its online expansion. These manifestos were involved in creating the continued foundations for cyberfeminism, and laid the continued foundations for online discourse, starting with Haraway's (1991) manifesto. Donna Haraway's (1991) *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* and the first cyberfeminist manifesto, is regarded as a foundational work which is viewed as the starting-point for cyberfeminist discourse. Haraway's compelling metaphor of a cyberfeminist being likened to a cyborg set a trend as to how feminist online discourse was used. Sollfrank (1989:n.p.) states that "her [Haraway's] cyborg, [is] the symbol for a future beyond gender, is considered by many to be the actual starting point for cyberfeminist thinking. However, Haraway herself never used the term Cyberfeminism or claimed any rights to it."

Haraway (1991:291) sets out the distinct characteristics of original cyberfeminist discourse in her Cyborg Manifesto. She discusses various points as guidelines to define cyberfeminism, referring to the "human/ machine confluence in the persona of the cyborg", a "socialist feminist culture (1991:29), "technological determinism" (1991:30), "fractured identities" (1991:31), a focus on female networking and connectivity (1991:32) (1991:36), as well as moving away from a traditional phallogocentric discourse (1991:35). Her ideas and points of focus have been vastly influential in how preceding manifestos have either responded to it or converted it into a new set of declarations, policies and aims.

A response to Haraway's manifesto came through VNS Matrix's (1991) *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This manifesto has a more physiologically and informally-directed tone in comparison to Haraway's academically-constructed manifesto, which functions through an anarchic and sexual overtone. The VNS Matrix's manifesto's tone and diction are deliberate, with an orientation towards female anatomy as a metaphor for cyberfeminists' activist effects on cyberspace. The diction includes "cunt", "clitoris", "mercenaries of slime",

“altar of abjection” (an indirect reference to “cunt”), and phrases such as “rupturing the symbolic from within”, “saboteurs of big daddy mainframe”, and “the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix”. Through the use of this visual metaphorical language, the VNS Matrix emphasises the issues they regarded as necessary for online discourse. Their primary issues were the disruption of a phallogocentric system, through “rupturing”, “probing”, infiltrating” and “corrupting” a cyberspace patriarchy. A third manifesto by Caroline Bassett (1999), *Manifesto against Manifestos*, questions the feminist discourse of Sadie Plant inasmuch as a feminist utopia is perceived through cyberfeminism. Bassett (1999:13) critiques the unrealistic and utopian idea of disembodiment, stating that “...the technology is Utopia/ is Dystopia debates have been futile in many ways.” Bassett’s *Manifesto against Manifestos* requires a review of the importance placed on cyberspace as a utopia, calling “for the restitution of the idea of Utopia in cyberfeminism. Bassett (1999:16) reiterates this by asserting that

A feminist Utopia does not inhere in actually existing (virtual) spaces, because they are insubstantial, or instantaneous, because they can conceal, or disguise, or transform. Nor is it to be found in particular configurations of particular technologies; technologies which are somehow or other ‘female’. Utopia, instead, needs to be relocated to the no-space, no-time of the possible, the wished for, the desired, envisioned, and imagined.

Bassett’s manifesto therefore leans towards a cyberfeminism that holds true to measurability and relevance to issues in the “now”, and not merely a utopian idea of what a radical cyberfeminism should entail”.

Lastly, a more recent manifesto is that of the Laboria Cubonika’s (2015) *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, which relates to the necessitated characteristic of a “pluralist feminism”, through “online discourse”, that considers intersectionality, and discusses “relevant political discourse and theory” (Hogeveen 2017:21). The manifesto of Laboria Cubonika (2015:n.p.) includes a list of seven headings, namely Zero, Interrupt, Trap, Parity, Adjust, Carry, and Overflow. Each section discusses issues such as the eradication of “essentialist naturalism”, and the demand that “feminism must be a rationalism” (Zero), the necessity of “digital tools”, a “feminism at ease with computation” (Interrupt), a request to move away

from a “heteronormative centre” (Trap), or a statement that “Xenofeminism is gender-abolitionist” (Parity). Once again there is a realisation that “our lot is cast with technoscience (Adjust), an underpinning of the fact that “digital technologies are not separable from the material realities that underwrite them” (Carry), and lastly a striving for “an emancipatory and egalitarian community” and “collective self-mastery” (Overflow). This manifesto shows similarities to the previous manifestos, in that there is a requisite to use cyberspace as a medium, and move away from gender binaries or forms of gender. It requests a sense of the “real” in relation to cyberfeminism, and an implementation of intersectionality, together with a need for self-emancipation and subjectivity.

Various underpinnings of cyberfeminism, through the characteristics and means of discourse of the aforementioned four cyberfeminist manifestos, is inherently identified. Cyberfeminist discourse, as a broad term, and through a collective of declarations, requires a digital and material reality. It also requires an emancipation from gender essentialism and binaries, and a measurable relevance in the “now” that relates to addressing gender inequity. Lastly, a current requirement is the resolving of issues around intersectionality, and a continuing connectivity and networking of a global cyberfeminism. The furtherance of cyberfeminist online discourse thus creates meaningful contributions to establishing the characterisation of cyberfeminism and its collective goals.

#### **2.2.4 The Age of Digital Humanities**

This thesis positions itself in the knowledge of a digital humanity poised towards design, and shows how online tools can advance academic research in a contemporary context. Digital humanities is a current discourse, and a technological practice which theoretically underpins the Revised Mako Mori Test as posited in this thesis. The need for a hybridisation of the humanities and the digital online environment is in fact multi-directional and ventures into the use of digital tools. Burdick et al. (2012:13) refers to the use of implementations (such as the Revised Mako Mori Test) and comment that “Digital Humanities” is a production-based endeavour in which theoretical issues get tested in the design of implementations, and implementations are loci of theoretical reflection and elaboration.

This endeavour is nevertheless progressive and is still developing as a form of digital academic research. The combination of a multi-layered visual language and visual studies, with text and models, for example, is therefore an integrative process. Burdick et al. (2012:13) rightfully point out that

Digital humanists have much to learn from communication and media design about how to juxtapose and integrate words and images, create hierarchies of reading, forge pathways of understanding, deploy grids and templates to best effect, and develop navigational schemata that guide and produce meaningful interactions.

The hybridisation of the humanities and cyberspace, phrased as the “digital humanities”, is thus an important context for both gender and online media studies in the cyberfeminist movement.

### ***A wider populist audience***

The procedural outlook of the digital humanities has opened up academic scholarship platforms to a wider populist audience, allowing for public participation in academic research and enquiry. This influences how film and gender studies are currently measured and discussed in an online capacity. Kirschenbaum (2010:2) accordingly describes the digital humanities as “more akin to a common methodological outlook than an investment in any one specific set of texts or even technologies”. The development of online media tests, such as the Revised Mako Mori Test, thus falls into a more common methodological outlook, through which characters in films can be evaluated. This assessment often takes place through broader populist participation, which inherently influences academic research on film studies.

Various questions originate from this characteristic of interdisciplinary networking and connectedness, and they are consequently concerned with a wider delineation of the digital humanities. Burdick et al. (2012:8) view this prospective public exposure of the humanities through digital platforms as an extensive networking tool. Burdick et al. (2012:8), furthermore, state that “the humanities continued to imagine the digital as a way of extending the toolkits of traditional scholarship and opening up archives and databases to wider audiences of users.”



This public networking encounter is similar to the complex attempt at demarcating the mechanisms of cyberfeminism. Both digital humanities and cyberfeminism have the internet and digital technology as platforms of discourse in common. The innovation of the Internet as a popular media platform poses an entirely innovative line on how public enquiry and discourse influence film and gender studies. A merging and venturing into gender studies in the humanities, such as Hollywood films, is hence reflected.

### ***The blogosphere and academic practice***

The way in which the public and students communicate in these new digital spaces, also called the blogosphere, is a relevant consideration. An understanding that text and communication would “expand” and “collapse”, according to Burdick et al. (2012:10) is described as “the aphorism, the short form, that which distills the long and the large into compact form.” As communication through the use of compact forms of commentary in the blogosphere using online tools is made, this is reflected in the functionality of the digital humanities. Online discussions about film as media studies in blogs as an extended tool are currently a common feature of the digital humanities. Through the use of gender media tests on blogs, the expansion of the digital humanities as a tool for academic research is stimulated.

The blogosphere as utilised by a wider populist audience, can be viewed in the context of the digital humanities. Burdick et al. (2012:9) states that it is

a galvanizing moment to be a humanist involved in devising, designing, and deploying new tools; in opening expanded modes of inquiry unthinkable under pre-digital conditions; and in forging innovative, multimodal approaches to traditional questions (about authorship, influence, dissemination patterns) through the as-yet-unrealized possibilities of digital platforms.

The merging of popular online media with digital humanities is thus a multimodal and multidisciplinary approach which initiates and allows for further development of a new form of humanist discourse. The supplementary tools of digital platforms, moreover, allow for global networking practices and public participation in a manner which the humanities had not seen prior to the improvement of the computer and the World Wide Web. Its influence on academic research and the humanities is



such that online discourse by means of the digital humanities has a broader base of communication and public participation is a real factor to be considered.

Kirschenbaum (2010:6) remarks on the relevance of recognising the blogosphere and social media platforms as a wider network for academic agency by stating that

Even more recently, I would argue, the network effects of blogs and Twitter at a moment when the academy itself is facing massive and often wrenching changes linked both to new technologies and the changing political and economic landscape has led to the construction of “digital humanities” as a free-floating signifier, one that increasingly serves to focus the anxiety and even outrage of individual scholars over their own lack of agency amid the turmoil in their institutions and profession.

Social media platforms, cyberspace and the blogosphere are therefore forms of communication for humanities students to expand their agency as gender and film studies researchers. This develops an achievement of a theoretical voice beyond the traditional constructs of academia. The digital humanities provide a conduit between a world demanding a technological approach towards communication and academic research around gender and film studies.

Using digital online platforms as a means of populating and discussing gender and film studies is a current interdisciplinary method which integrates popular online environments and academic research with numerous other possibilities. The digital humanities thus offer a technological practice through the use of online tools such as the Blogosphere, consequently adjusting and extending the digital humanities’ network.

### **2.3 MEASURABILITY IN CYBERFEMINISM**

The measurability of gender equity in films and the focused goal-orientation of cyberfeminism include a versatile arrangement of tests and results across various institutions and cyber-platforms in the digital humanities. Quantitative results to support feminist discourse are required to allow for the measurable expansion of qualitative discourse. These results demonstrate concrete evidence of gender inequity and reiterate the relevance of movements such as cyberfeminism. An example of bias is seen when the term “feminism” is frequently met with the

contentious responses of online descriptors such as “feminazi.”<sup>3</sup> This backlash is used as a rationale to avoid investing in an understanding of the need for gender equity, thus inherently maintaining the existing patriarchal status quo. Measurability is therefore an important aspect of gender discourse in showing factual evidence of the existing gender inequity gaps which need to be eliminated, to allow for the transformation of gender inequity.

### **2.3.1 Quantifiable Assessments and Measurable Goals of Gender Equity**

The measurability of gender equity is made available through the digital humanities, and demonstrated through applications and programs across various cyber-platforms. Academic institutions’ reports and research, online gender studies, online media tests, call-outs by Hollywood actresses and social media pages such as Facebook, are some examples of how measurable gender equity findings are brought to the attention of a broad online public.

#### ***USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism***

Academic institutions such as the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism are responsible for “the annual Media, Diversity, & Social Change (MDSC) initiative which examines inequality on screen and behind the camera across the 100 top-grossing domestic films” (Smith et al. 2016:1). According to Smith et al. (2016:1), their research currently includes the evaluation of 35,205 characters across 800 of the most popular movies from 2007-2015. This extensive research is done by a team of academics and is made available online for further contemplation and awareness by a wider audience. The findings of this report broadly show that “it is clear that despite advocacy and good intentions, change remains difficult to achieve” (Smith et al. 2016:25). Findings from this research show that there is an unrealistic gender-proportional representation in film. Also, different groups are absent altogether from the screen, and women are still under-represented, despite an improvement in representation rates. A lack of female directors is also a contentious issue, and the representation of disabilities is still

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<sup>3</sup> The term *feminazi* is a popular and stereotypical description of feminist activities, in particular radical feminists. The rate at which this term is used on social media platforms such as Facebook shows a negative connotation with feminism and how it is received by a broader public. The presence of terms such as *feminazi* is indicative of a particular understanding of feminism which can instead be countered by measurable evidence of gender equity, assuming that quantitative evidence will have an effect on feminist bias.

problematic (Smith et al. 2016:25-27). Quantitative measures have yet to align with the qualitative discourse of feminism (offline) and cyberfeminism relevant to eradicate the still-existing bias.

### ***The Centre for the Study of Women in Television and on Film***

Additional quantitative academic reports made available online comprises the research done by Lauzen (2016) from the Center for the Studies of Women in Television in Film, San Diego State University. Lauzen's research includes *The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250 and 500 Films of 2015*, *Women @ the Box Office: A Study of the Top 100 Worldwide Grossing Films* (2008), and *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top 100 Films of 2015* (2016). Lauzen's (2016:2) report covers a wide range of findings which clearly demonstrate gender inequity. This includes statistics that, in 2015, 91% of the top 250 Hollywood films were not directed by women. Moreover, 82% of these 250 top films had no women writers, showing that gender inequity is a reality on and off screen. The representation of female characters on-screen is problematic as it relates to the possibility that male writers and directors may not be conscious of the agency of their female characters. It is evident that their roles in the "manufacturing" of female characters play a significant role, and have been found to be a problematic factor as to how female characters are represented.

### ***The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media***

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, in association with the University of Southern California, The Rockefeller Foundation and UN Women, have published various articles and online reports. This is further evidence of the large discrepancies still present in female representation in film. In the report *Gender Bias Without Borders: An Investigation of Female Characters in Popular Films across 11 Countries*, Smith et al. (2014:2) declare that "despite a push to promote females worldwide, one example of where progress remains stagnant is the U.S. film industry". These findings, moreover, show that

the percentage of female speaking characters in top-grossing movies has not meaningfully changed in roughly half a century. Further, women are often stereotyped and sexualized when they are depicted in popular content. Occupationally, our previous research shows that few women hold positions of

power and importance on screen. While Hollywood is quick to capitalize on new audiences and opportunities abroad, the industry is slow to progress in creating compelling and complex roles for females.

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media has also taken full advantage of the technological application of face recognition to assess the speaking-time of female characters. This application, namely the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GDIQ), is further discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

### ***Polygraph: The Bechdel Test as Gender Equity Assessment Tool***

The research of Friedman et al. (2017:n.p.), as another alternative cyber-based assessment of gender inequities in film, is included. Their assessment, on the website *Polygraph*, under the title *Hollywood's Gender Divide and its Effect on Films*, uses the Bechdel Test as a measure to assess the two hundred highest grossing films from 1995-2015. Friedman et al. (2017:n.p.) determined that

whether or not there's unconscious bias against women, things aren't changing. Films made in 1995, on average, failed the Bechdel Test 37% of the time. Today? 38%. Films made in 1995 had about 18% women in director, producer, and writing roles. Today? 17%.

Another Polygraph online assessment *Film Dialogue from 2000 Screenplays, Broken Down by Gender and Age*, includes the Bechdel Test as a base measure to analyse the speaking roles of females in film scripts. Anderson and Daniels (2016:n.p.) state that these assessments occurred due to online discussions on female representation in film being "all rhetoric but no data, which gets us nowhere in terms of having an informed discussion". Anderson & Daniels (2016:n.p.) describe their assessment as "a census rather than a study". They Googled eight thousand screenplays, and matched, compiled and compared the number of words spoken by male and female characters. According to Anderson and Daniels (2016:n.p.),

In 22% of our films, actresses had the most amount of dialogue (i.e. they were the lead). Women are more likely to be in second place for most amount of dialogue, which occurs in 34% of films. The most abysmal stat is when women occupy at least 2 of the top 3 roles in film, which occurs in 18% of our films. That same scenario for men occurs in about 82% of films. Across thousands of films in our

dataset, it was hard to find a subset that didn't over-index male. Even romantic comedies have dialogue that is, on average, 58% male.

Although the *Polygraph* assessments use different methodologies (counting words from film scripts) in comparison to the research of Smith et al. (2016:32), which uses a wide spectrum of assessment methods, the results are very similar. The wide variety of *Polygraph* assessment methods used by Smith et al. (2016:32) include the use of the independent-speaking character as the primary unit of analysis. They look at characters' roles (i.e. primary, secondary, and tertiary), using Downs & Smith's (2010:725) variable definitions, which examines character sexualisation and use a leadership team "in rendering judgements about story leads/ co-leads or whether the narrative was carried by an ensemble cast", using online sources such as IMDBPro, Box Office Mojo, and Variety Insight. These qualitative assessments conclusively show that the representation of females in film is still greatly subjected to gender inequity and in need of representative equilibrium.

The combination of quantitative cyberfeminist discourse and qualitative results supports the claims made through online discussions and rhetoric, through measurable evidence. Saturating cyberspace with gender inequity results, and female representation in film, is an effective awareness strategy. It furthermore stimulates action towards attitudinal change and cognitive shifts. The digital humanities, in conjunction with cyberfeminism, hence impact on the deliberation of meaningful gender equity transformation.

The results achieved through mixed method research substantiate the need for gender equity in film. They also allow for public awareness of the gender discrepancies and bias in the film industry. Inasmuch as film companies, directors and scriptwriters ought to address these imbalances, the broader public (viewers) needs to be aware of these discrepancies. Public participation is a necessary component to change in the film industry, especially in an era where people's voices are amplified through various platforms in cyberspace.

## 2.4 POWER THEORY AND NARRATOLOGY

### 2.4.1 Feminist Narratology: An Overview

This thesis considers both feminism and narratological constructs in separate yet symbiotic terms, which necessitates a brief overview of feminist narratology. The synthesis of narratology and feminism is analysed by Susan Lanser (1986) in her article *Toward a Feminist Narratology*. Ruth Page (2006) also discusses feminist narratology in her book *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology*. The amalgamation of narratology and feminism, according to Lanser (1986:610), is a contradictory process, as narratology is “scientific, descriptive, and non-ideological” whereas feminism is “impressionistic, evaluative, and political”. Lanser (1986:611) looks at the possibilities of “the compatibility of feminism and narratology”, whereas Page (2006:5) regards feminist narratology as “the feminist *critique* of narratology”. This critical analysis of feminism and narratology functions as a feminist application of narrative theory, which is used as tools to analyse the selected Hollywood mainstream films (*Pacific Rim*, *Aliens*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*) in the thesis. The compatibility of feminism with, and the critique of narratology through, a feminist lens provides theoretical underpinnings for this thesis.

#### **Context**

Both Lanser (1986) and Page (2006) consider the meaningful role of the context of a narrative from a feminist lens. Lanser (1986:612) highlights the relevance of context through specifying three areas where narrative theory and feminism differ. The three areas are identified as: “the role of gender in the construction of narrative theory, the status of narrative as mimesis or semiosis, and the importance of context for determining meaning in narrative.” The reference to context in the selected science fiction films is particularly relevant, as the context determines the meaning of agency for the female protagonists.

Page (2006) states that a narrative structure cannot be separated from its content and context. She refers to contextualist narratology and accordingly links the linguistic features of a feminist narrative to its socio-cultural context. Lanser (1986:612) quotes Brewer (1984:1143) who states

when narratology does attempt to account for the contextual, it does so in terms of narrative conventions and codes. Yet their capacity to account for social, historical, or contextual differences always remains limited by the original formalist closure within which such codes and conventions are defined.

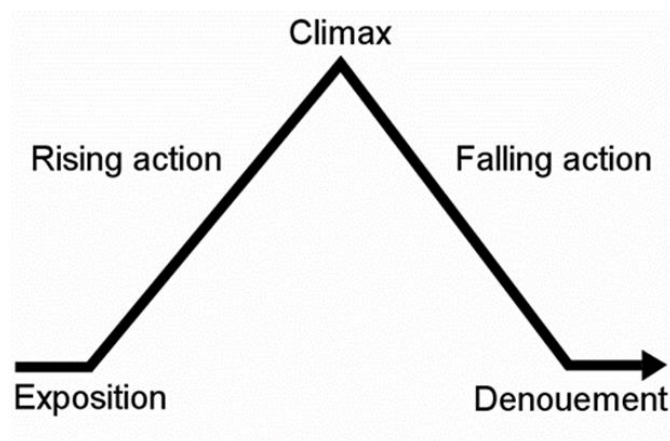
The various science fiction contexts of the selected films have a direct relation to the contextual functionality of feminist science fiction. The use of feminist science fiction creates a contextually meaningful utopia where a patriarchal system has collapsed or is under attack. Female protagonists have more prospects for enacting agency and subjectivity in a non-gendered or non-patriarchal environment. Despite this contextual relevance, the narratological construct is still in place. Freytag's pyramid is often used as a narratological construct to indicate how a plot's narrative arc, and a protagonist's character development, take place. The narratological construct is consequently accountable for the contextual limitations, as defined by the narratological codes and conventions embedded in the storyline. The science fiction context is an integrated layer of the character's narrative arc, as coded by the narrative arc of the film. The narrative construct of the film is therefore technically informed by the context, as it provides the primary base from which the characters and film's plot operate.

### ***A Gendered Plot***

Page (2006:22) raises an issue around the linearity of a "male plot" in comparison to a "female plot", stating that a male and female plot differ in their construct and form. According to Page (2006:22), a "male plot" is linear, with a trajectory of rise, peak and fall in a narrative tension, ending with a defined point of closure, whereas a "female plot" is non-linear, repetitive and resistant to narrative closure. Lanser (1986:617) refers to the polyphony of a woman's voice, where the female narrative works on different layers. This suggests that the female narrative comprises different strands which need to be identified and disentangled, being multi-layered, and with different levels of meaning. This, however, according to Lanser, (1986:620), denote the sub-texts of the narrative. These multiple layers do have relevant meaning, but she concerns herself with the public layer (main and observable narrative) instead. This allows for direct access to both the public and the visual text (film). One can argue that although both Lanser (1986) and Page (2006) refer to the multi-layered characteristics of "the female plot", (female



character arc) their relevance lies in the main narrative arc. The main, observable narrative arc openly connects with the viewer of the film, which permits a reading of the visual text.



**Figure 2.1. Freytag's Pyramid**

Source: [http://cdn.www.duarte.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Freytags\\_pyramid.png](http://cdn.www.duarte.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Freytags_pyramid.png)

[Accessed 9 June 2015]

The immediately observable narrative arc is illustrated through the use of Freytag's Pyramid as narratological analysis (Figure 2.1). In the Revised Mako Mori Test, it functions as a visual assessment of the public narrative layer, although Page (2006:22) describes it as the "male plot". The linear narrative arc of Freytag's Pyramid does resemble Page's (2006:22) description of a "male plot". It visually pronounces "a trajectory of rise, peak and fall in a narrative tension ending with a defined point of closure". Freytag's Pyramid traditionally stipulates an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. This however does not mean that Freytag's pyramid necessarily functions as a male-orientated narrative arc, but as stated, it presents the observable layer of the narrative. The interpretation of a narrative arc's functionality and construction is relevant in relation to its observed lens, and how that affects its contextual meaning.

Lanser (1986:623) considers how a gendered (feminist) lens influences the interpretation of a plot through the structural meaning and intention. She analyses the influence of a gendered lens on the construct of plot in relation to the agency or "deeds" of the protagonists by stating that



The units of anticipation and fulfillment or problem and solution that structure plot according to narrative theorists of plot assume that textual actions are based on the (intentional) deeds of protagonists; they assume power, a possibility, that may be inconsistent with what women have experienced both historically and textually, and perhaps inconsistent even with women's desires. A radical critique like Mária Brewer's suggests that plot has been understood as a 'discourse of male desire recounting itself through the narrative of adventure, project, enterprise, and conquest', the 'discourse of desire as separation and mastery' (1151, 1153).

The construct of plot, if viewed through a feminist narratological lens, needs a full perceptual reconsideration, but is not without problematic gender binary assumptions of its own. The assumption that 'adventure, project, enterprise, and conquest' are solely the making of male desire is in itself a problematic notion, as the selected protagonists in this thesis corroborate.

Feminist narratology is an inevitable and relevant undertaking, but raises issues around male-female binary constructs and assumptions. The shift from a gender-binary is argued from Butler's position, namely that the term "woman" is not a blanket statement. Butler (2004:6) states that

the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse on which it functions.

Aspects around the multi-linearity or polyphonic characteristics of female narrative in comparison to the mono-linearity of male narrative need consideration in the context of the structural characteristics of a narrative arc. Male and female desires in terms of the plot of a narrative can be problematic, especially when it is assumed that desires are dissimilar or similar, depending on the gender of a character.

#### **2.4.2 Power as a Relation and Stimulus of Subjectivity (Agency)**

The power relations between male and female protagonists in film have been a subject of feminist discourse and popular media text analysis from the 1980s. The male-female character power relations viewed in Hollywood films is accountable for

a hierarchical power dynamic. This in turn affects the subordination and agency leverage of a character. As the female character's agency is of focal consideration in the Bechdel and Mako Mori Test, Foucault's analysis of the network and meaning of power are relevant to this research. A shift from a gender-binary orientation, as considered in the Revised Mako Mori Test, is further seen, in the context of Foucault's power theory. The lens through which agency is viewed in this thesis is encompassed in Foucault's (1982:221) statement, namely that "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free". The capacity of a character to act and change beyond an imposed systemic reality, and an engendered power relation, is the basis of a strong character arc.

### ***Gendered power relations***

The Revised Mako Mori Test puts forward an argument for the existence of a gendered power relation (the male-female binary) in Hollywood film. The test observes the construct of a film's narrative arc, with reference to this gendered power relation, with the focus on how female character representation occurs. In addition to gendered power relations, the female protagonist's character arc is in a relation to the narrative arc (a power base) of the film. Male-female gendered power relations have an effect on the fulfillment of the female character's agency and the development of her character arc in hierarchical relation to the narrative arc.

The freedom and power of a character, as argued by Foucault (1982:221), points to the female character's continuous inherent agency. The potential of the female's agency is the superseding premise of her character, and not dependent on her hierarchical position only. Foucault (1982:221) argues that an individual is faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse components may be realised. The female protagonist is thus, irrespective of her placement within a particular power structure, always inherently free to act, "field of possibilities" which reflects on her capacity to be a subject and experience agency.

Power as a gendered relation can be revealed through plot and narrative devices such as conflict and motivation between male and female protagonists. These powers or forces will be enacted as entities of strength, and as a means to achieve

or reveal agency. Foucault (2003a:29-30) states that power is a relation between forces, or rather, every relation between forces is a “power relation”. Dahl (1957:202) in his article *The Concept of Power* also refers to power “as a relation among people”. It can be understood that characters are units of acceleration in the context of the film’s narrative arc. The questions provided in the Bechdel and the Mako Mori Test highlight the required shift in gendered power as amplification of gender equity and, more so, female agency. An individual or character is however part of a network of force-on-force power dynamics and bases, with the network (a force) interacting with the character as locus (another force). The female character, as a force striving to express agency, requires acceleration and not hierarchical subordination to the male character.

In gendered relations a character’s motivation can serve as a driving force for agency, notwithstanding the potential for conflict in a plot. The motivation of a character thus has the potential to either impinge on, or assist with, the development of the character arc of another character. The capacity for connection between characters can also drive character development through association and bonding.

This is evident in the mind-merger of Mako Mori and Raleigh Beckett in *Pacific Rim*, which serves as a catalyst for the development of Mako Mori’s agency. Dahl (1957:204) refers to the importance of connection between individuals, stating that without this connection, “no power relation can be said to exist”. Power is therefore not a possession, nor a commodity, but rather a nominal exchange between forces in relationship. This nominal exchange of power communicates directly to the agency of a character in a film.

Power functions, therefore, operate as a serviceable element or motivation between forces such as the characters in a film. These characters produce a network, which is a part of the negotiation and relay of power.

### ***The power of action***

Action is a dynamism which moves a character forward in the narrative arc, and allows a continuum of power. The selected female protagonists (Mako Mori,

Imperator Furiosa, and Ellen Ripley) all show a hierarchical and personal transcendence through the power of action. Foucault (1982:219), in specifying that “power exists only when it is put into action”, reiterates the power action has in transforming a situational position. Power hierarchies, personal emancipation and character development take place as power structures shift within the narrative arc. A strong female protagonist will, as a result, experience the power of action to propel her character arc forward.

Power is an underlying aspect available to characters, inherently negating powerlessness. Foucault (1982:386) argues that within a power relation, in this instance, the male-female binary and character relations, a strategy or process towards emancipation is necessary to cause a shift. Thus a character, at all times, has the potential to be the relay of power and need not be held captive to a particular power structure. A strategy or process towards agency or subjectivity may require a severance from subordination. This involves an understanding, or even more, a rebellious notion of knowing that change and power are chosen. This supports action, either towards agency, or the full enactment of it. Foucault (1982:386) explicates this power relation on becoming a subject, by stating that an individual is not trapped:

What I mean by power relations is that we are in a strategic situation towards each other...we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behaviour or non-behaviour of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation, and there is no point where we are free from all power relations. Well anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing.

The transition does, however, require action to adjust the power dynamic, as shown in the dynamic character arcs of the selected female protagonists.

Table 2.1 below illustrates the corroboration between the set of ten questions used in the Revised Mako Mori Test, and its theoretical underpinnings. Characters are bound to the power which is “given” to them, in terms of the limitations of a film’s narrative arc, decided on by the scriptwriter. Characters work within this context to potentially experience agency and subjectivity. The scriptwriter and analyst David

Trottier (2016:n.p.) pose these ten questions (engendered in this thesis to accentuate the focus on strong female characters) to establish whether a character shows a form of agency (power). The series of questions directs an understanding of the dynamism of the female's character arc in propelling the narrative arc of the film.

The Revised Mako Mori questions are stipulated in convergence with power theory as discoursed by Foucault, and narratology as discussed by Bal (2009). The potential for action and the beginning of power are established through the existence of a character arc (Question 1). A dramatic question and confrontation (Questions 2 and 3) provide a challenging benchmark to show the character's capacity towards action and change. The rising action (Question 4) reiterates how action is necessitated to develop a character's agency and to show subjectivity. As Bal (2009:205) stipulates, "the subject and the power predominate more, or are more active in a grammatical sense, than the object and the receiver".

The rising action in the character arc is required to show an active change in a subjective sense. A process which includes problem solving, skills development, and a higher level of self-awareness (Questions 5-9) shows character development through deliberate action. This change in the female protagonist is a direct result of active participation in the narrative arc of the film, finally leading to a resolution of the initial problem (Question 10), and so fulfilling the protagonist's agency.

**Table 2.1. Corroboration between the set of ten questions used in the Revised Mako Mori Test, and its theoretical underpinnings**

	POWER THEORY	NARRATOLOGY	TEN CHARACTER ARC QUESTIONS
	Michel Foucault	Mieke Bal	David Trottier
<b>QUESTION 1</b>	“[Power] <b>produces</b> things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, <b>produces</b> discourse.” Foucault (Interview <i>Truth &amp; Power</i> :119)	“Actors will be regarded in their <b>relation to the sequences of events</b> that – as follows from our definition – they cause or undergo.” Bal (2009:201) “In order to begin to analyse this, it helps first to select <b>which actors must be taken into consideration</b> and which not.” Bal (2009:201)	Is the character arc <b>established</b> ?
<b>QUESTION 2</b>	“...we are in a <b>strategic situation</b> towards each other...we are in this <b>struggle</b> ...” Foucault (Interview <i>Sex Power and Politics of Identity</i> 1982:386)	“Hendricks’ point of departure is that <b>the structure of the fabula is determined by confrontation</b> . Two actors or groups of actors are <b>confronted</b> by each other.” Bal (2009:192)	Is the character <b>confronted</b> by an <b>inciting incident/ catalyst</b> ?
<b>QUESTION 3</b>	“Power constantly <b>asks questions and questions us</b> ; it constantly investigates and records...” Foucault ( <i>Society Must be Defended</i> :25)	“The stronger the determination, the greater the shift away from <b>tension generated by questions</b> concerning the outcome and <b>towards the tension generated by the question</b> whether the character will realize its own determination and/ or break away from it.” Bal (2009:125)	Is the character confronted by a <b>dramatic question</b> ?
<b>QUESTION 4</b>	“[Power] is a <b>mode of action</b> which... <b>acts upon [others’] actions</b> , on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or future.” Foucault (1982:219)	“In principle the subject and the power <b>predominate more</b> , or are <b>more active</b> in a grammatical sense, than the object and the receiver, because they are <b>the agents</b> , or <b>the</b> (grammatical) <b>subject</b> , either of the function of intention/ evasion or of giving/ receiving.” Bal (2009:205)	Is the character <b>rising in action</b> ?

QUESTION 5	<p>“...faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of <b>responses, reactions, results</b>, and possible <b>inventions</b> may open up.” Foucault (Interview <i>The Subject of Power</i> 1982:200)</p>	<p>“What a figure <b>does</b> is as important as what he or she thinks, feels, remembers, or looks like.” Bal (2009:115)</p>	<p>Is the character <b>attempting to resolve the problem</b> initiated by the first turning point?</p>
QUESTION 6	<p>“...individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several <b>ways of behaving</b>, several reactions and <b>diverse comportments</b> may be <b>realized</b>.” Foucault (Interview <i>The Subject of Power</i> 1982:221)</p>	<p>“The <b>accumulation of characteristics</b> causes odd facts to coalesce, complement each other, and then <b>form a whole</b>: the image of the character.” Bal (2009:126)</p>	<p>Is the character learning <b>new skills, discovering her capabilities</b> or have a <b>raised self-awareness</b>?</p>
QUESTION 7	<p>“...the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge <b>new objects of knowledge</b> and accumulates <b>new bodies of information</b>...” Foucault (Interview <i>Prison Talk</i>:51-52)</p>	<p>“The <b>changes or transformations</b> which a character undergoes sometimes <b>alter the entire configuration of character</b> as it looked during the analysis of mutual relations.” Bal (2009:127)</p>	<p>Does the character have a <b>new sense</b> of who she is <b>becoming</b>?</p>
QUESTION 8	<p>“Relations of power ‘are indissociable from a <b>discourse of truth</b>, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, <b>put into circulation</b>, and <b>set to work</b>.” Foucault (<i>Society Must Be Defended</i>:24)</p>	<p>“Repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters, and transformations are four different principles which work together to <b>construct the image of a character</b>. Their effect can only be described, however, when the outline of the character has been roughly filled in. This is a constant element in narratological analysis: a dialectic back-and-forth between <b>speculation and verification</b> through <b>open-minded analysis</b>.” Bal (2009:127)</p>	<p>Is the character awakening and <b>experiencing a higher level of self-awareness</b>?</p>

<b>QUESTION 9</b>	<p>“[[Power] it incites, <b>it induces</b>, it seduces, it makes easier more difficult, in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon <b>an acting subject</b> or [subjects] by virtue of <b>their acting or being capable of action</b>.” Foucault 1982:219)</p>	<p>“Once a character’s <b>most important characteristics</b> have been selected, it is easier to <b>trace transformations</b> and to <b>describe them clearly</b>.” Bal (2009:127)</p>	<p>Has the character <b>changed</b> since the beginning?</p>
<b>QUESTION 10</b>	<p>“...we are obliged <b>to produce the truth</b> by the power that demands the truth and needs it in order to function: we are constrained, we are condemned <b>to admit the truth or to discover it</b>.” Foucault (<i>Society Must be Defended</i>:25)</p>		<p>Has the dramatic question been <b>resolved</b> by the character?</p>

## 2.5 SPECTATOR THEORY IN FILM AND CYBERFEMINISM

### 2.5.1 Laura Mulvey: Spectator Theory

Mulvey’s work, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1973) as a foundational mechanism in feminist film theory, requires a brief overview in the context of the public response to female representation in film. Mulvey (1973:16) looks at Hollywood and its manipulation of visual pleasure, stating that Hollywood constitutes an “unchallenged, mainstream film” which has “coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order.” Mulvey thus looks at how the male gaze influences the representation and image of women in film, and how the dominant patriarchal order allows this gaze to reign supreme.

The male gaze has an effect on how females are represented in Hollywood film, and The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media inadvertently responds to Mulvey’s theoretical observations. The manner in which females are represented in film, and the way females respond to Hollywood film and the Geena Davis Institute’s slogan “If she can see it, she can be it”, support Mulvey’s findings. Current



spectator studies on female representation in Hollywood, as spearheaded by The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, operate as a foundational reinforcement of current feminist film theory and Mulvey's findings.

Female spectator response is an active component in how females are represented in film today. It is not merely the male gaze which finds pleasure in looking, but also the female in terms of identification. Mulvey (1973:16) discusses the pleasure of looking, with reference to Freud's discussion on scopophilia in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Scopophilia objectifies people, "subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze", in contrast to a subjective identification with a character. Mulvey (1973:17) relates the cinematic viewer's experience to a "primordial wish for pleasurable looking" as "mainstream film focuses on the human form." Some thought on the female character who is objectified or made a subject through identification brings a different lens to the same screen.

Mulvey's reference to Lacan's theory on the "mirror stage" is thus relevant as to how the viewer perceives cinematic pleasure or identification through female representation. Lacan (1949:2) describes the mirror stage as follows:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as *an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient *imago*.

Mulvey (1973:17) uses Lacan's mirror stage theory to reiterate how the mirror moment is

an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the *I*, the subjectivity.

The pleasurable viewing of the male gaze, or identification with the female protagonist of the female gaze, brings a different reading to the screen. The representation of female characters on screen has multiple implications insofar as the viewer is concerned. Mulvey (1973:19) argues that "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly". The

representation of women in film, according to Mulvey, therefore serves to fulfil the scopophilic needs of the male gaze. If female characters are styled according to strength and skills, a female audience finds pleasure in the viewing. Mulvey (1973:19) points out how women are used as spectacle in a normal narrative film, and quotes the film director Budd Boetticher:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.

Boetticher's remark bears no relation to the three female protagonists analysed in this thesis, as they represent a female who has full importance as subjects, and are not intended to be objectified.

The effect female objectification has on the female viewer is recognised by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2017:n.p.). The institute defines some of its main functions as confronting gender imbalance and unconscious bias in the entertainment industry (Hollywood). The effects of female representation in film on both young males and females are also analysed, while noting the effect of negative stereotypes on self-esteem and career occupation. The media so grooms young viewers to observe female and male characters predominantly from a "male gaze" perspective. This view inevitably perpetuates subconscious bias in adults. On the institute's website, Geena Davis (2017:n.p.) states the following, in basic terms:

I don't know how in the 20th century we can possibly justify not showing girls things they can aspire to and at the same time how can we possibly be showing boys this narrow vision of what women are and what they can be. Eighty percent of media consumed worldwide is made in the United States so we are to a great extent responsible for exporting this negative image of women and girls.

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media underlines Mulvey's strictures on the male gaze, its subconscious bias, and the consequential gender inequity in Hollywood. The institute reiterates Mulvey's theoretical findings through computerised tests, and quantitative research through reports such as *The Reel Truth: Women Aren't Seen or Heard*. The report shows that "male characters

received two times the amount of screen time as female characters in 2015 (28.5% compared to 16.0%)”, and “in 2015, male characters spoke two times as often as female characters in the top box office movies (28.4% compared to 15.4%).” These statistics reiterate Mulvey’s (1973:19) observation of placing the female in a mainly passive, non-speaking role when, as she says “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female”. The deduction would therefore be that women are still, to a large extent, placed on screen as objectified or inactive characters. The female character mostly serves as support for the male’s narrative, and is consequently made subsidiary in her role. This also affects her role in relation to the narrative arc of the film, despite continuous efforts to develop the role of the strong female character on screen.

Half a century later, Mulvey’s critique is still relevant, showing that the effect of the representation of females has far-reaching consequences on the spectator’s assimilation of gender equity. The research done by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media underlines the relevance of the analysis of spectatorship of female representation in current feminist film studies with similar results.

### **2.5.2 A Brief Discussion on Intersectionality: Mako Mori in *Pacific Rim***

Mako Mori, as a strong Japanese female character, draws focus to the significant lack of intersectionality in the Hollywood film industry, as it predominantly narrates a white female storyline. The character Mako Mori adds to feminist film discourse as the film *Pacific Rim*, featuring her character, has failed the Bechdel test. However, this has brought attention to her role as an intersectional character. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014:3) discusses the necessity of developing multiple narratives, in contrast to singular views only, as a current feminist issue in her book, *The Danger of the Single Story*.

Adichie (2009: n.p.) highlights the limitations of culturally stereotyping females, in narratives, and how it shapes thinking around gender equity, at a Global TedTalk in 2009. She discusses the precariousness of a singular view on ethnic groups and cultures. Mako Mori’s, as a Japanese character, relates to both gender and intersectional narratology, and shows the relevance of breaking away from a

“singular story”. With reference to current important issues in feminism, Munro (2013:n.p.) reiterates that feminism is often preoccupied with the structural delineation of the movement more than the relevance of how to develop dialogue in various areas of inclusion. Munro (2013:n.p.) states that

While controversy abounds concerning the delineation between second-, third- and fourth-wave feminism, it is clear that several key issues animate contemporary feminism. Intersectionality and the exclusionary nature of mainstream feminism remain a real concern. The political potential of the fourth wave centres on giving voice to those women still marginalised by the mainstream.

A focal shift to intersectional preoccupations, rather than the technicalities of feminism, highlights the relevance of a strong character arc for marginalised characters in film. The representation of Mako Mori as a strong Japanese protagonist had such an impact on her Japanese audience, that their response at *Pacific Rim* failing the Bechdel Test brought about the suggested Mako Mori Test. Adichie (2009:n.p.) reiterates the necessity of embracing stories from different cultures and genders by stating that

the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Viewing female characters from a marginalised lens which stereotypes multicultural characters perpetuates narrative singularity. Such singular storytelling flattens the character’s representation, in turn leaving the character powerless. Adichie (2009:n.p.) translates the singular story into a dynamism of power which exists through non-exclusive power structures, thus creating singularity. Reflecting on the spectator response of Mako Mori’s empowered character arc, the strategy of story-telling has an impact on the representation of a female character. Multiple narratives from all kinds of women are necessary to develop an understanding of different cultures and backgrounds.

Adichie (2009:n.p.) quotes Achebe, who points out that a balance of stories is required for Hollywood film to bring a wider account of narratives to the screen. Intersectional inclusion establishes diversified character development such as

Mako Mori, who needs more access to Hollywood to ensure multi-layered and expanded narration.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has been a theoretical exposition of key terms and an explanation of the analytical tools that will be used in the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test. It also accords a theoretical framework for the analysis of the selected female characters who are assessed through this popular media test. An overview of cyberfeminism and the digital humanities gives the context in which popular media tests such as the Revised Mako Mori Test functions. The chapter also defines the term “measurability” as a relevant consideration in the analysis and exploration of popular media tests. Measurability is furthermore a necessary and rational component of the feminist movement, and functions as a quantifiable manner to accomplish credibility, and gender equity.

An analysis and application of narratology and power theory to corroborate the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test was employed. Narratology and power theory thus underpin the analyses of the character arcs, as well as the agency of the selected female protagonists. The chapter likewise touches on various particulars of power relations between male and female protagonists to establish and analyse the power hierarchy in film.

Spectator theory and the way characters are viewed are discussed in terms of the viewer response to female representation in Hollywood film. The reaction of an audience has an influence on the continuation of female stereotypes and specified character arcs. This, in turn, is a response to directed gaze-orientation. The need for intersectional narratives is discussed. The inclusion of stories from a broader range of women is deliberated as an underlying concern which needs response and development in film. An awareness of the necessity for intersectional narratives is a significant aspect of how various female stories are narrated. The following chapter is an application of the theoretical analysis as it relates to popular test development in assessing female representation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **GENDER BIAS: FEMALE REPRESENTATION TESTS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Feminism, as it is positioned in the earlier part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has measurable issues and critiques to take into consideration. Feminism continuously endeavours to transform gender inequity and female representation through legal frameworks, policies, awareness-raising programs and education. This includes transformation through feminist film theory and a critique against the American film industry. The criticism and the challenges of feminism adjust as the movement builds on the achievements of its long stretch of first-, second- and third waves. The feminist movement's advancement is in turn influenced by critiques of how it expresses its need for change. It has nonetheless achieved quantifiable goals, such as the landmark right to vote, and other measurable successes. These include propelling the civil rights movement, lobbying for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in various American states, and bringing women into the American work-place. Issues such as rape culture and body politics receive urgent attention, and pop culture icons continuously join the movement through a rights-based approach, thus broadening feminism's reach and educational value. The outcomes of feminist film theory count as part of the movement's success, although its challenges are constant. Hence, a need for the continued critique and evaluation of mainstream Hollywood film is necessitated in various areas, including cyberfeminism.

Hollinger (2012:7) suggests that feminist film theory focuses on two distinct components: a critique of mainstream media and the advocacy of an alternative or counter-cinema. These components are prevalent in cyberfeminist debates around female representation in film, as mainstream cinema is scrutinised online. Although cyber-discussions enable the continuation of marginalised female voices in debates around gender equality (Maxwell 2004:n.p.), they still pose issues. The Internet is not yet available to all women on an international platform, and represents only some sectors of the global community. Zeisler (2013:181) states that

encouragement to embrace new technology is crucial if women, who may also be women of colour and low-income women, are to influence the development and direction of future technologies and the public policy that dictates how they are used.

The goals of feminism are thus continuous, as online discourse requires a wider, and more inclusive participation. In this thesis, the available cyber-discussions and online gender media tests on the Web 2.0 are regarded as an indication, but considered as limited to online feminist film discourse and theory. Feminist film discourse as a component of feminism, needs to take into account the substantial critique against the feminist movement, to ensure its measurable progress.

One critique against feminism is the trivialities (Paglia 2017:n.p.) it embraces through the course it has been taking. Cyberfeminism, which includes online film analysis as a platform for multiple female voices, can be a contradictory platform for the superficial conveyance of feminist ideals. Thornham (2013:32-34) reviews the feminist movement by questioning whether it requires a rebranding strategy, reiterating that feminism has been struggling with this critique for the past twenty-five years. Additional claims by Paglia (2017:n.p.) support a rebranding strategy, as she affirms that feminism has become a movement where the focus is on irrelevant details and issues. In her article *Feminism is over, the battle is won. Time to move on*, Hill (2015:n.p.) states that feminism “should be celebrating its triumphs. Instead it has descended into pointless attention-seeking”. In an interview with Ella Whelan from *Spiked*, Paglia (2016:n.p) states that feminism has regressed, is self-absorbed and engaged with trivialities. She accuses feminists of navel-gazing, and the creation of a self-imposed persona of victimhood. Paglia (2017:n.p.) points out that feminism faces more important issues than the trivialities it currently embraces, issues of which “the biggest problem is to what degree Western feminism can be exported to the world”. She claims that feminism should be focused and orientated through constructive projects and functionalities.

Butler (2004:205), however, considers that the expression of feminism as social transformation (which may be perceived as being trivial and often aggressive) is a need for recognition, and identity formation. She states that “we are all, in the very



act of social transformation, lay philosophers, presupposing a vision of the world, of what is right, of what is just, of what is abhorrent". She indicates an underlying psychological need for recognition of how women voice their understanding of feminism. Butler (2004:132) states that recognition "takes place through communication, primarily but not exclusively verbal, in which subjects are transformed by virtue of the communicative practice in which they are engaged". However, she (2004:133) recognises that this transformative process of recognition (activism, cyberfeminism, and feminist film theory could be included) holds the risk of destruction as a lamentable occurrence during the therapeutic situation. The aggression of some feminists seen in the process of "demanding" recognition is described as "break-downs". Butler (2004: 134) states that "the task will be to work against them and to strive for the triumph of recognition over aggression". Recognition, as a form of social transformation and feminist identity formation, can be acquired instead through measurable evidence and results, without aggression and trivialities.

Butler (2004:134) acknowledges that misrecognition can be an occasional and consequential by-product of a need for recognition. Such a by-product can be seen in the upsurge of criticism against current feminism as delivered through a documentary such as *The Red Pill* (2017) by Cassie Jaye. In *The Red Pill* current issues from the Men's Rights Movement are explored, appealing to its audience to acknowledge how men are disadvantaged and discriminated against. Although The Men's Rights Movement is described on the documentary's website as not "being a misogynist hate-group aiming to turn back the clock on women's rights", it can be regarded as a by-product of feminist misrecognition, and to an extent founded as a cause to fight against feminism (Kimmel 2014:n.p.).

Thus, the Men's Rights Movement as a counter movement intrinsically serves as a defense against the positive outcomes of feminism, questioning the effect they have on gender equilibrium, masculinity and male rights. The validity of such criticism against the feminist movement reiterates that feminist groups should consider their projects and goals judiciously. Feminism need to provide relevant measurability and legitimacy, thus maintaining credibility in its concerns around the changes it strives for around gender inequality and representation. The course which feminism takes



gains ground through relevant and substantial evidence of quantifiable change in what proves to be either gender inequality or bias (Butler 2004:134).

Gender bias and inequality are not necessarily quantifiable or measurable. A blogger, Mark Manson (2017:n.p.), states that “the hardest part about it [gender bias] is that there’s no easy metric in the social arena for what is equal and what is not” and thus “today feminism has a measurement problem”.

There are, however, numerous computable projects in Hollywood film which warrant the legitimacy of feminism and its goal towards gender equity, also making a sufficient attempt at showing measurable outputs. The issue of gender equity measurability is in numerous instances nuanced, and the cause of uncertain decision-making or interpretation. Nevertheless, gender equity studies in the film industry fervently engage with gender inequity in order to eradicate integrated and foundational gender bias. As a current issue, the study of gender bias and inequality in film and popular media have been initiated through quantitative research that lays out the representation of females in film and media.

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media does research on Hollywood films, stating on their website (2017:n.p.) that “the Institute has amassed the largest body of research on gender prevalence in family entertainment, spanning more than 20 years.” One aspect of the Institute’s research includes the measurability of the on-screen and speaking time of females in film, in comparison to their male counterparts. This is procured through the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ). On the Institute’s website (2016:n.p) the current technologically-enhanced research shows quantitative measures of the speaking- and screen-time females have in the top 100 grossing films of 2014 and 2015. The Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ) is described as

a ground-breaking software tool developed by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary’s University to analyze audio and video media content. Funded by Google.org and incorporating Google’s machine learning technology, and the University of Southern California’s audio-visual processing technologies, GD-IQ is the only software tool in existence with the ability to measure screen and speaking time through the use of automation. This revolutionary tool

was co-developed by the Institute and led by Dr. Shrikanth (Shri) Narayanan and his team of researchers at the University of Southern California's Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL), with additional analysis from Dr. Caroline Heldman.

Quantitative research such as the GD-IQ is a highly effective method which allows for solid evidence of gender inequity studies in Hollywood film. In comparison to "superficial" attempts at feminism, or as Paglia (2016:n.p.) states, the "self-absorbed" forms of feminism, quantifiable measures holds a strong argument. Measurability in gender equity may face challenges such as unidentified bias, but wherever it can be evaluated, bias should be approached with constructively restructured means of measurement.

The attempt to measurably assess power relations between female and male protagonists in film has become a common means of ascertaining how female characters are represented on-screen. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media's slogan, "If she can see it, she can be it", reflects this existing impact between the viewer and the representation of females in film. The impact female representation has on females, and their relation to male characters, is now tangibly measured with accuracy. Through this form of measurability and thorough examination, the conceptual terrain of bias and inequality are shown using tangible evidence. This research, which produces quantitative evidence and indisputable statistics, makes active and resistant feminism a viable factor.

The phenomenon of online popular media tests, which is responsible for interactive discussion platforms, is another form of measurable dialogue on gender equity in film. The creation of popular media tests primarily functions as awareness, an interactive operation or alternatively as fostering an educational discussion sessions. Zeisler (2013:181) refers to these forms of interaction on blogs as "gateways" for "people who have little background in feminism or who are not ideologically invested in it." This is where the general public has an opportunity to assess viewpoints, and to evaluate gender equity and power relations, as well as character and narrative arcs in the context of female representation. Gender media tests, such as the Bechdel Test and the Mako Mori Test, amongst others, are

constructing a channel between academic research goals and publicly populated online assessments. This interaction aids a general awareness around female representation in film, and opens up a substructure of enquiry that has underpinnings in quantitative measurable research. Popular media tests, such as the Mako Mori Test, benefit from academic research around female representation in film, which aids the constructive activities of feminism on online platforms.

Critics against active feminism must consider that bias and gender inequality are persistently present in a society which is erroneously perceived as equal. Measurable research, together with online discussions and popular media tests continuously eradicate and address this misguided perception. Quantifiable research traverses barriers through effectively communicating the fact that gender inequity continues to exist in the film industry.

### **3.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF GENDER BIAS AND FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN HOLLYWOOD FILM**

Gender bias in Hollywood is a problematic phenomenon which receives a substantial response through various structural frameworks and institutional research programmes, including the perceptive contributions of actors, directors, online tests and discussions. Research from various academic institutions and foundations are intermittently and quantifiably populated, securing up-to-date analysis on female representation in Hollywood, on and behind the screen. Investigative research on the Hollywood film industry regularly exposes gender bias and shows a continuous inequality in female representation.

Current gender research, together with public appeals and awareness campaigns from Hollywood actors, likewise extends beyond issues of gender equity and representation in the film industry exclusively. The constitution of the United States of America, as it relates to gender equity, is to this day a problematic foundation for comprehensive gender equity. Since the American constitution is outdated in its approach towards gender equity, it inherently reflects on a foundational perception against gender equality in the film industry of Hollywood. The United States Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission's investigation of gender bias in Hollywood in 2015 was spurred on by prior investigations of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The investigation, in particular, observed patterns of gender bias in the hiring of film and TV directors (Keegan 2016:n.p.). The ACLU required the United States government to take action against these allegations, and cited a USC study which found that

only 1.9% of directors of the top-grossing 100 films of 2013 and 2014 were women. Of 25 Paramount Pictures films that have been announced through 2018, not a single one has a woman director attached, in a tally first noted by The Wrap. The same is true of the 22 Twentieth Century Fox Films that have been announced (Keegan 2016:n.p.).

These numbers and statistics confirm a statement by Kathryn Bigelow (the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Director in 2010), namely that

Hollywood is supposedly a community of forward thinking and progressive people, yet this horrific situation for women directors persists. Gender discrimination stigmatizes our entire industry. Change is essential. Gender neutral hiring is essential (Dockterman 2015:n.p.).

The statistics relating to female directors in Hollywood are true for both female representation behind the screen, and for on-screen female representation. Many Hollywood actors are currently speaking out against gender bias and industry sexism with greater frequency, relaying their experiences and opinions regarding the issue of gender bias in the film industry.

At the 2015 Academy Awards, Patricia Arquette (The 2015 winner of Best Supporting Actress) stated that "It's our time to have wage equality once and for all" (Needham & Carroll 2015:n.p.). Carey Mulligan, after her role in the film *Suffragette* (2015), stated in an interview with *Reader's Digest* that Hollywood was generally only interested in stories about men (Child 2015:n.p.). Mulligan, in discussing the questionably late release of the film *Suffragette*, stated that

I don't think it's an oversight at all. I think we have a sexist film industry, and stories about women are largely untold. This is one that's fallen by the wayside because of

that. I think a lot of people have sat around tables in various production offices and decided it wasn't financially viable.

Mulligan's comment highlights the problem of male directors largely not addressing female orientated topics in film.

However, the problem of female representation and the telling of female stories can be related to a foundational issue, as they relate to the constitution of the United States of America. The ratification of The Equal Rights Amendment, namely that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex", has never been signed by the U.S.A. Congress. In 2015 this oversight was brought to light by the activism of multi-academy award winner, Meryl Streep. The Equal Rights Amendment is constitutionally one of the most regressive issues facing women in America. In a letter to each member of the U.S.A. Congress, Streep "urg[ed] them to revive the battle to add the equal rights amendment, guaranteeing parity for women under the law, into the U.S.A. constitution". Her letters were accompanied by a copy of *Equal Means Equal*, a book by Jessica Neuwirth, president of the Equal Rights Amendment Coalition (ERA). Neuwirth is campaigning for an update of the U.S.A. constitution to include the amendment prohibiting discrimination against women and girls under the law (Walters 2015:n.p.).

The foundational significance and context of the ratification of the amendment as set out on the ERA Coalition website is that (n.d.:n.p)

By the time the deadline for state ratification ended in 1982, 35 states had ratified the amendment, just three states short of the number needed to put the ERA into the Constitution. Since then, the ERA has been reintroduced in Congress every session. Although polls indicate that more than 90% of Americans support the ERA, Congress has not once voted it in over the past thirty years.

In lieu of this fact, the United States of America Congress has, to date, not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. This suggests that the constitution of America does not acknowledge gender equity, and that therefore women are not, constitutionally, equal to men. This stark oversight and laissez-faire attitude of Congress shows a symptomatic and deeply-ingrained gender bias that has not been effectively

removed from the American psyche. The far-reaching gender research done by institutions, as well as vociferous exposure of these inequalities by Hollywood stars, attempts to make amends for these foundational arrears. If the constitution of a country does not promote gender equality, industries such as Hollywood will not be influenced by any legal compulsion to exercise gender equality. Gender bias and female representation in Hollywood can be considered as symptomatic of a constitution that still approves of gender inequity.

Gender-biased female representation in Hollywood is, according to the Media, Diversity, & Social Change (MDSC) Initiative, in association with the Annenberg Foundation and the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, a measurable reality in the film industry. The research, as headed by Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Dr. Katherine Pieper, is summarised in their 2016 report titled *Inequality in 800 Popular Films: Examining Portrayals of Gender, Race/ Ethnicity, LGBT, and Disability from 2007-2015*. This up-to-date research is annually adapted and populated, and shows an evaluation of 35,205 characters across 800 of the most popular movies from 2007- 2015 (Smith et al 2016:1).

Some of the MDSC's key findings show that "out of 4370 speaking or named characters evaluated, 68.6% were male and 31.4% were female across the 100 top-grossing films in 2015", while "of the 1365 directors, writers, and producers of the top-grossing films of 2015, 81% were men and 19% women. Of 107 directors, 92.5% were male and 7.5% were female". "In 2015, 73.7% of characters were White, 12.2% Black, 5.3% Latino, 3.9% Asian, <1% Middle Eastern, <1%Indian /Alaskan Native, < 1% Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander and 3.6% other or 'mixed race'" (Smith et al 2016: 1-2). These statistics, which span almost over a decade, clearly show gender bias and inequality in the film industry. Other findings by the MDSC show that the percentage of female-speaking characters in action and/ or adventure films escalated only from 20% in 2007 to 25.5% in 2015. Sexy attire, as indicative of the objectification of characters, is worn by 30.2% of females in comparison to 7.7% males, and females show 29% nudity in comparison to 9.5% of males in the top films of 2015 (Smith et al. 2016:3-4).

It is evident that female representation in Hollywood, on- and off screen, continues to battle for a significant transition to an acceptable gender equity ratio. The current inequity issues in Hollywood continue with gender disparities, despite exposure through measurable research, tests and discourse, and is progressively, but far too slowly, being rectified and eradicated. Biressi and Nunn (2013:217) reiterate this fact by stating that “the need for feminist intervention has never been more pressing, with plentiful evidence of the persistence of sexism in old and new guises”. Efforts to eradicate gender inequity in Hollywood is now as relevant as it has been throughout the 20th Century.

### **3.3 THE BECHDEL TEST IN CYBERFEMINISM**

#### **3.3.1 A Brief Background of the Bechdel Test and the Development of Various Popular Online Media Tests**

In 1985 Alison Bechdel, a cartoonist who created the comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*, also created “The Rule”, popularly known as The Bechdel Test (Adams 2013:n.p.). Bechdel has managed, over the past three decades, to produce a substantial following. The Bechdel Test has a dedicated non-official website, namely the “Bechdel Test Movie List” with a current listing of 7320 films (as recorded on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2017). The test has managed to influence Swedish film theaters to rate films according to its three-rule requirements (Adams 2013:n.p.). In additional, the test has influenced the creation of alternative popular media tests, thus creating its own sub-culture. It continues to have an impact on the spectatorship and perception of female character representation in film.

The Bechdel Test consists of a basic set of three questions that assess whether a film takes certain aspects of female representation and autonomy into consideration. The questions posed are: 1) Are there at least two named women in the film 2) who talk to each other 3) about something other than a man. The questions in their simplicity, raise further wide-ranging issues on female characters’ representation in film. The test has through its development and been transformed into a popular platform from which a whole array of other similar media tests have



been launched. This popularity indicates a requirement, and an awareness of, the power and subjectivity female characters possess or lack in films.

The Fandom Geek Feminism Wiki website (2017:n.p.) shows a variety of approximately fifteen suggested popular media tests, based on the Bechdel Test. These creative media tests indicate that new sets of questions are consciously developed according to an expanded recognition of requirements around female representation in film. Zeisler (2013:179) states that “much of what occurs on feminist blogs is consciousness-raising, which was the bedrock of second-wave feminism and in many ways its most indelible legacy.” Online bloggers consequently participate in a process of awareness, education and feminist enquiry. Cyber-entries of, discussions about, and the development of media tests on Geek Feminism indicate a feminist awareness of female representation, and its effects on society. Zeisler (2013:179) further states that

The mindful connection of individual problems to societal ones is crucial and must happen continuously to counteract narratives put forth in mainstream, non-feminist media.

Public participation in the expansion of popular media tests, as well as discussion and online feminist discourse, consequently reflect the underpinnings of foundational feminist goals.

The collective framework of the Geek Feminism media tests (Table 3.1) underlines the importance of female representation across an array of feminist criteria. Although media tests are not developed according to academic analysis, they emanate from a rationale based in second-wave feminist film theory. McCabe (2007:7) explains this preoccupation as an interpretation based on an understanding of “gender and representation in relation to patriarchy”. In their compilation, these popular media tests consider the agency and positioning of female characters in film, as reflected in Western society. The observations embedded in these media tests are reflective of, and reiterate a societal awareness of, what a broad-spectrum female audience observes, or what Haskell (1987) refers to as reflection theory. Haskell (1987:xviii) explains that “movies are one of the clearest and most accessible of looking glasses into the past, being both cultural



artifacts and mirrors.” Popular media tests underline a reflection of societal reality as expressed through the online participation of females around the topic of identity formation through their personal reflection on female representation.

Populating gender media tests, and the very suggestion of such tests, indicate a need to develop a form of measurability that holds substance in the context of the feminist movement. These tests are the collective attempt of an online population to express a measurable sense of the agency of female characters, thus essentially reflecting their own sense of subjectivity. An engagement in media tests is thus a method of feminist self-empowerment and self-reflection. A summarised report from a survey of 4300 women by the J. Walter Thompson Company, in association with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2017:1), shows that

female role models in film and TV are hugely influential in driving women to improve their lives. The research by the Institute and JWT finds that 90% of women globally feel that female role models in film or TV are important, 61% said female role models in film and TV have been influential in their lives and 58% said that women have been inspired to be more ambitious or assertive.

There is no confirmed quantifiable evidence that the Bechdel Test has been responsible for a definite change in how females are represented, despite its thirty-five-year presence. It does, however, present a continuous assessment of gender inequity, and consequently is a method to bring awareness of gender bias in film. The Bechdel Test guides people to question their own spectatorship of films and to consider a different lens.

In Table 3.1 a selection of fifteen tests from the Geek Feminism Wiki (2017:n.p.) is compiled and includes a synopsis of its description as available on the website. On the right-hand side of the table, six pertinent aspects of female representation are listed, as identified in the sample of popular media tests. This includes gender power relations, agency/ subjectivity, narrative arc proximity, intersectionality/ race, LGBT gender representation and viewer response.

Observable subject correlations between various popular media tests and their consideration of particular issues exist. A gender power-relation correlation exists

between the Mako Mori-, Ellen Willis-, Raleigh Beckett-, Bechdel/ Wallace plus Mako Mori-, Crystal Gems-, and Finkbeiner Tests. A prominent requirement for assessing a character's agency and subjectivity can be observed in the Mako Mori-Sexy Lamp-, Tauriel-, Bechdel/ Wallace plus Mako Mori-, Crystal Gems-, and Finkbeiner Tests. A close proximity to the narrative arc of a film (power relations) is relevant in the Mako Mori-, Sexy Lamp-, Tauriel-, Bechdel/ Wallace plus Mako Mori, and Vito Russo Tests. A requirement for intersectionality is observable in the Deggan's Rule "Test". A prerequisite for a LGBT gender representation is found in the Vito Russo- and Topside Tests. Lastly, a viewer's response, in the context of anger towards the existence of feminism in a film can be assessed through the Furiosa Test, and female objectivity through the Babs and Kara Test.

The overarching theme of these popular media tests revolves around the accessibility of the agency and self-actualisation of female characters in film. The aspects related to the selection of popular media tests, as highlighted in Table 3.1, correspond with the development of, and the requirements of the Revised Mako Mori Test.

**Table 3.1. Geek Feminism Wiki popular media tests**

<b>Suggested Popular Media Test</b>	<b>Description of Popular Media Test</b> Reference: <a href="http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Media_test">http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Media_test</a> [Accessed 07 July 2017]	<b>Conceptual consideration</b>					
		<b>Gender Power Relations</b>	<b>Agency/ Subjectivity</b>	<b>Narrative arc proximity</b>	<b>Intersectionality/ Race</b>	<b>LGBT Gender representation</b>	<b>Viewer response</b>
<b>Mako Mori test</b>	The Mako Mori test attempts to test the non-centricity of men to a woman character's own narrative arc, with a) at least one female character; b) who gets her own narrative arc; c) that is not about supporting a man's story.	●	●	●			
<b>Ellen Willis test</b>	The Ellen Willis test determines whether a work's depiction of at least two related characters would work if the genders of the characters were switched.	●					

<b>Sexy Lamp test</b>	The Sexy Lamp test (coined by Kelly Sue DeConnick) determines the validity of a female character's position in a work. The test is failed if she could be replaced by a "sexy" lamp and the work's plot wouldn't fall apart. Examples of failures, are when a female character's role is limited to any of the following: being "fridged" being "tupperware" or otherwise inspiring a male character's actions and plot being fought or competed over/ for being a living MacGuffin. Similar to the Bechdel Test, this is a rough litmus test, but with clearer implications for failing. A work that fails the Sexy Lamp Test has reduced its female character(s) to extremely objectified position(s), with little or no agency, and no importance to the plot as an active character.		●	●			
<b>Tauriel test</b>	The Tauriel test attempts to test the film's depiction of a woman character who is competent at her occupation.		●				
<b>Raleigh Becket test</b>	The Raleigh Becket test, coined by geekalitarian, evaluates a film by a central male character whose narrative needs the development of a female character, but is precluded from being sexually or romantically involved with the character.	●					
<b>Furiosa Test</b>	The Furiosa test evaluates whether the film made people on the Internet angry for its being "feminist".						●
<b>The Babs and Kara test</b>	The Babs and Kara test evaluates character design by examining whether specific characters would be recognizable, even if they were wearing identical bathrobes and had their hair completely covered.						●

<b>Bechdel/ Wallace + Mako Mori</b>	A few bloggers on Tumblr and WordPress (as well as an article on Autostraddle) have applied Bechdel/ Wallace and Mako Mori together.	●	●	●			
<b>Crystal Gems test</b>	To be acceptable, a work has to have at least four female characters who pass all these tests: It must pass the Bechdel Test; It must pass the Mako Mori Test; It must pass the Sexy Lamp Test; Each [major female] character must pass at least one of these tests, and each test must be passed by at least one [major female] character; the more times you can repeat the previous step, the better. One effect of passing this test is to highlight instances of a narrative centrality of non-androcentric dialogue between leading woman characters.	●	●	●			
<b>Finkbeiner test</b>	The Finkbeiner test seeks to determine the non-fictional depiction of a real-life woman by her own merit, rather than her relationship with a male spouse or children.	●	●				
<b>Vito Russo test</b>	The Vito Russo test, developed by members of GLAAD and named after a pivotal co-founder, determines the inclusiveness of a creative work by the placing of an openly-LGBT character in a pivotal role that is non-dependent on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity. The LGBT character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect.			●		●	

<b>Topside Test</b>	The Topside Test is a media test developed by Tom Leger and Riley MacLeod to test whether a fictional transgender character is created for a transgender audience or a cisgender audience. The media piece must contain more than one trans character. Some of these characters must know each other. These characters need to talk to each other about something other than a transition-related medical procedure.					●	
<b>Deggans' rule</b>	Deggans' rule, coined by TV critic Eric Deggans, seeks to determine inclusivity by the inclusion of two people of colour in the main cast of a narrative that is not about race.					●	
<b>Other racial tests</b>	Latoya Peterson has created some drafts of a race version of the Bechdel test called "racialicious.com". Alaya Dawn Johnson posted the literal race version of the test and applied it to science fiction at The Angry Black Woman. Ars Marginal posted a version that required the following: "a movie must have at least one named character of colour, whose primary trait is not their race, and who does something important besides help a White person."					●	

### 3.3.2 Problematic Aspects of the Bechdel Test

The simplicity of the Bechdel Test results in problematic oversights of some nuanced aspects of this method of film analysis. Issues include the fact that not all feminist films pass the tests, female tokenism and problematic dialogue dynamics. Dialogue dynamic includes the gendered content and substance of dialogue, as a

#### ***Not all good feminist films pass***

The Bechdel Test's online functionality is, according to Silverstein (2013: n.p.), often misconstrued as a feminist test, and not appropriately applied as a gender test. The Bechdel Test does not claim to be a feminist test but is, regardless, used

for this purpose. A critical assessment of a film using this test inevitably results in a blurring of the nuances of female representation because of its oversimplified stance. Wilson (2013: n.p.) indicates that good feminist films fail the test due to this simplistic orientation, maintaining that

...the Bechdel Test is not without major flaws. While called a 'test', it is truly just a guideline; there are plenty of gorgeous, fantastic films with powerful female characters and feminist themes that actually don't wind up passing the test sometimes – just as there are films that meet the criteria that don't necessarily do anything to further gender equality or female empowerment.

The three rules of the Bechdel test, as a measure, appeals to an online public as a gender awareness guideline, but it fails many feminist films through its oversimplification.

### ***Female tokenism***

The prescribed minimum of two female characters in a film to pass the test enables a bias towards single female characters. The presence of a single female character lends itself to a perfunctory attempt at passing the test through tokenism. A two character pass requirement is, effectively, presented to allow a dialogue between female characters. The assumption assumes that a single female character will either have no speaking time, or alternatively only converse with a male character. The Bechdel Test aspires to avoid the likelihood of a conversation revolving solely around the male's character arc. The assumption maintains that the female will more likely raise issues relating to the male character, negating the development of the female character.

The minimum allowance of two female characters caused the Bechdel Test failure of the film *Pacific Rim* (2013), despite Mako Mori's ability as a strong female character. This resulted in the Mako Mori Test, as a rectification of the previous minimal requirement of two female characters. The Mako Mori Test addresses this numeric issue but inevitably enables potential tokenism through the minimum requirement of a single female character. A YouTube user UJames1978Liveson (2016: n.p.) mentions that “at least implying to filmmakers and studios that literally the only thing they have to do to avoid any feminist critical backlash is to add a

token and an entirely disposable “strong” female character, which, make no mistake, Mako Mori was.”

Tokenism is, however, not exclusive to the presence of one character, as two female characters can arguably function as a perfunctory presence in an attempt to pass the Bechdel Test. The presence of characters do not require the lack of a developed character arc which reflects agency, therefore results in the vulnerability of a numeric test validation.

### ***Dialogue dynamics***

The significance of dialogue and the duration of on-screen speaking time of male and female characters has resulted in online popular media tests, as well as academic research projects. The Bechdel Test poses specific dialogue arrangements as it relates to the power hierarchies of characters. The test requirement of dialogue content which exclude any topic which revolves around any topic a male, assumes that this will remove the subservient positioning of female characters.

This requirement is based on Simone de Beauvoir’s (Schwarzer 1984:16) identification of a patriarchal form of male identity formation as a means of confirming the female’s position of Other. The inherent implication of a dialogue that revolves around a male involves the female as Other. De Beauvoir (Schwarzer 1984:16) states that

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incident, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.

A dialogue between female characters assumes the eradication of the inessential positioning of female characters by means of being active participants in the conversation.

The assumption that all dialogue revolving around a male as a topic, will consequently eradicate the agency of the females having the conversation. It is, however, debatable and constitutes a narrow demarcation. An example from *Pacific Rim* shows Mako Mori discussing Raleigh Beckett’s performance as a fighter. The dialogue revolves around a male, who, however, functions from Mako Mori’s



authoritative position, as she critically evaluates his performance, pointing out areas of improvement. Mako Mori therefore discusses Raleigh Beckett, but as a knowledgeable assessor who has insight and acumen in the skills of battle. The dialogue may not evolve entirely around a male, but rather reflects her expertise as a fighter pilot and warrior with a keen aptitude for analysing his skills and weaknesses. The dialogue, which reflects Mako Mori's mentoring skills, acts as a form of agency, as this eventually leads to her fighting as a victorious warrior.

### ***Substance of dialogue***

The substance of a dialogue between two female characters can also be disputed, since it may involve any inferior topic. This is a dialogue with a lack of narrative implication, which results in a lack of the development of a female's character arc; nor would it have sufficient substance to allow their characters to impact the narrative arc of the film. For example, a hypothetical scene with two women, named Sally and Mary, talking about making sandwiches, still equates to a conversation by two identified female characters, but does not develop their character arcs or agency. The substance of a dialogue must preferably impact the development of a female character and the narrative arc of the film.

The over-simplified structure of the Bechdel Test lacks a consideration of nuanced film components, which subsequently result in a lack of a discernment relating to measurability. The test as an awareness benchmark for gender equity can achieve this goal, but renders an implausible conclusive result. As an informal guideline to the awareness of gender equity in film, the Bechdel Test does however serve a purpose in enhancing the debate and conversation around gender equity in film.

## **3.4 THE MAKO MORI TEST IN CYBERFEMINISM**

### **3.4.1 A Brief Analysis of the Mako Mori Test**

The Mako Mori Test can be regarded as a reactionary popular media test, transpiring from its problematic aspects and presented through the simplicity of the Bechdel Test. The Mako Mori Test was suggested by a Tumblr-user Chaila (2013) after the female protagonist Mako Mori in *Pacific Rim* (2013) had failed the Bechdel

Test. This occurred merely due to the lack of another strong female character, which accounted for a lack conversation between two women in the film.

Chaila mentions that the Mako Mori Test was a creative response to an online response by a Japanese woman with the pseudonym of Spider-xan (2013: n.p.). Spider-xan's personal experience of Mako Mori's failure of the Bechdel Test reflected the impact it had on her as a Japanese woman:

It's really easy to throw away a film because of that test (which is flawed and used incorrectly in a lot of ways) if you're a white woman and can easily find other films with white women who look like you and represent you...but as an East Asian woman, someone like Mako – a well-written Japanese woman who is informed by her culture without being solely defined by it, without being a racial stereotype, and gets to carry the film and have character development – almost NEVER comes along in mainstream Western media. And honestly – someone like her will probably not appear for a very long time.

Spider-xan's response and personal experience show how the representations of female characters in film impact on female viewers, in this instance a representative role-model for a selected cultural group. This interactive response reflects McCabe's (2004:38) statement that

feminists working in the field of cultural studies moved the debate on from an understanding of the textual spectator (someone constituted in the film text) to "a consideration of the continuity between women's interpellation as spectators and their status as a social audience" (Kuhn 1992:310).

The Bechdel Test's rejection of Mako Mori resulted in an assembly of female spectators' ownership, recognising her as a Japanese character who constitutes an individual as subject. This audience response shows the comprehensive need for a spectator position which includes a character beyond the narrative of the white, middle class heterosexual norm. The rescue of Mako Mori's character resulted in the reconfiguration of the Bechdel Test as a means of accommodating single female characters. The limitations of the Bechdel Test ironically functioned as an indicator of poor representation of female characters, consequently compensated for by a counter-reactive Mako Mori Test.

The Mako Mori Test rules require a film to have at least one female character; who operates in her own narrative arc; that is not about supporting a man's story or attempts to resolve the deficiencies of The Bechdel Test. However, as Romano (2013: n.p.) points out,

this [The Mako Mori Test] is about as indicative of 'feminism' (that is, minimally indicative, a pretty low bar) as the Bechdel Test. It is a pretty basic test for the representation of women, as is the Bechdel Test. It does not make a movie automatically feminist.

The Mako Mori Test, similarly to the Bechdel Test, functions as gender awareness guidelines around female representation, which facilitates discussions on gender equity in film.

The Mako Mori Test, in turn resulted in its own problematic issues and received criticism for being developed. A YouTube-user, UJames1978Liveson (2016: n.p.), posted a video in which he critiques the development of the Mako Mori Test for its over-simplification. He asserts that the development of such a test insufficiently addresses female representation in film. UJames1978Liveson (2016: n.p.) claims that:

not only did its [Mako Mori Test] advocates not only fallen in the identical trap of making gender representation a matter of ticking boxes on a checklist, instead of actually dealing with the underlying social norms and attitudes which are the cause of the problems to begin with, but essentially set the bar on the floor of Stan's wine cellar, effectively only demanding more if perhaps slightly better written Princess Leias.

UJames1978Liveson (2016:n.p.) further mentions that the Mako Mori Test, similarly to the Bechdel Test, risks the legitimisation of tokenism, which continues to be problematic.

However, the Mako Mori Test aims to prevent against a superficial assessment through its inference to agency and requires that a female character should have her own narrative (character) arc. The relevance and relationship of her character arc to the narrative arc of the film directly relates to her motivational position and

impetus to drive the plot. A female character can be tokenistic through her presence, but a developed character arc represents power and agency. A character arc which does not impact on the narrative arc of the film implies a supportive role in relation to a male character in a film. In this respect, the Mako Mori Test does not make provision for the substantiation of a female's character arc, nor does it demarcate the risk of a female character's purpose as a subjugated character.

A predominant consideration for The Mako Mori Test should include a focus on the female character's relation to the narrative arc of the film, and not her relation to the male protagonist. If the female character's narrative arc is viewed in relation to the male protagonist, it perforce creates a binary orientation. However, if the female character is assessed in proximate relation to the narrative arc of the film, her agency and subjectivity are substantiated by her arc. This positions the female protagonist as a subject, and beyond a male-female binary, as defined by the Mako Mori Test. Relationships between male and female characters are inevitable but should, as de Beauvoir (1984:174) states not be "defined exclusively in her relation to a man". This focal emphasis is discussed in the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test.

### **3.4.2 Focus on the Role of the Narrative Arc in the Mako Mori Test**

An important modification, which the Mako Mori Test adopted from the Bechdel Test, is the pivotal attention given to the narrative arc of a female character. The focus of the Mako Mori Test on the narrative arc of a female character is a directed and concrete measure of the agency and subjectivity of a female character in a film. The agency and narrative power of a female protagonist, as measured through the current format of the Mako Mori Test, is analysed as follows:



where the ‘voice’ of the text of the film is introduced. Although the exposition is not, time-wise, a drawn-out component of the film’s narrative arc, it does offer the foundational formation of the main protagonist’s arc.

The narrator, through focalisation, has a powerful impact on the structuring of the plot and story of the film’s narrative arc. Bal (2009:18) reiterates this structuring by stating that, through the focalisation of the narrator, “the represented ‘colouring’ of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, [is] the holder of the ‘point of view’”. If the main focus of the Mako Mori Test is to establish whether a character *has* a narrative arc, such an arc can technically commence and conclude at any point in the film’s narrative arc. This does not necessarily substantially add to the primary “voice” of the text of the film, as it is not influential in the “voice” of the narrative arc. However, if a character’s narrative arc is established and embedded in the mechanisms of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement of the film’s narrative arc, a greater possibility of its having leverage exists.

### ***Story and plot (Chronology and causality)***

It is likewise of significance to the functional position of the character arc of a protagonist to briefly discuss the difference between a story and a plot. This supports the meaning of a character’s leverage and power relation to the narrative arc of a film.

A female character’s narrative arc should be situated in the plot, rather than the story, as the plot is influential in terms of the power the female character imprints on the film’s narrative arc. The “story”, according to Forster (1954:86), is defined merely as “a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence”, in comparison to the “plot”. Forster (1954:86) defines the plot as “a narrative of events, [with] the emphasis falling on causality” (Forster 1954:86); thus, in other words, the causal and logical structure which connects events. The difference between the story and the plot is therefore a shift from chronology to causality. It reflects the effect of a character’s power position in either the story or the plot of a narrative arc.

If the concept of causality (cause and effect) is semantically analysed, the definitions of the words “cause” and “effect” provide meaning in relation to the female protagonist, who preferably holds a position of causality. The female

protagonist is then, in addition to an entity within a chronological line of events, someone with causal or fundamental effect and also a subject who should be positioned within a causal framework. Forster's observation regarding causality pertains to the plot, rather than the chronological mechanisms of the story, emphasising a power shift in a protagonist's influence on the narrative arc of a film. The differentiation between story and plot, as they relate to the power orientation and hierarchy of a character, is being an unassertive presence in a film in contradistinction to being an active person (causa position) who brings change to the narrative arc. The Mako Mori Test should, thus, consider the character's narrative arc and how it is positioned in either the plot or the storyline of the film's narrative arc.

### ***Actor or character***

The Mako Mori Test does not emphasise the relation of the female character's narrative arc to the film's narrative arc, nor the power relations of the character's narrative arc to the plot and/ or the story. An underutilised character in relation to their function in the film, would, to use Bal's (2009:57) terminology, be referred to as an "actor" rather than a "narrator" or "character". A character that is not effectual in the plot of a film would be referred to as an "actor", and not a "character". As Bal (2009:112) states, "...the difference between the more specific term 'character' and the general, abstract term 'actor' [is] at issue... [and] more often than not a character resembles a human being and an actor need not necessarily so". The Mako Mori Test stresses the necessity for a female "character" and not a female "actor". Bal (2009:112-113) reiterates the power relations of a character (or acting entity) to the narrative arc, as follows:

...let us assume that a character is the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics. In this view, an actor in the fabula is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit. As readers [viewers], we 'see' characters, feel with them and like or dislike them. These characters are only reducible to actors in a process of abstraction.

A female character then is an "actor" if merely utilised as a construct in the story, whereas she is a "character" if positioned as an "effect" in the plot. A character can thus drive the narrative arc of the film and showcase, as Bal states, "human characteristics" which the audience can "see" and "feel", and relate to. The relation

a female “character” has with the audience as a “person”, other than a construct or “actor”, is not addressed through the simplicity of the Mako Mori Test. Bal (2009:57) emphasises the hierarchical order of the “actor” in comparison to the narrator (by implication a “character”) by stating that “the dependence of the actor’s text with regard to the narrator’s text should be seen as the dependence of a subordinate clause to a main clause.” Bal’s analogy reiterates why a female character’s narrative arc should have effectual substance in relation to the narrative arc of the film. She should not feature merely as an “actor” who occupies a position as a sub-text presence in the chronology of the story.

These nuanced considerations pertaining to a female character’s narrative arc provide a necessary focus for the narrative arc and agency of a character in a film. A character’s narrative arc has influence (cause) on the narrative arc and power over the meaning of the plot (effect), and it allows a strong female “character” (not “actor”), the status to display “human characteristics” and range as a female protagonist. A female protagonist (“character”) with the power to effect change in the narrative arc of the film (plot) gives a female character an effectual narrative arc other than a narrative arc that only serves a structural purpose in the story (“actor”). The Mako Mori Test should therefore establish a requirement for a female character’s narrative arc to have a direct effect on the narrative arc of the film. Her narrative arc should preferably have an effectual impact throughout all the stages of the narrative arc, as seen in Freytag’s Pyramid model.

### **3.5 DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVISED MAKO MORI TEST**

#### **3.5.1 The Revised Mako Mori Test Components**

The Revised Mako Mori Test presents the development of a more encompassing version of the suggested version of The Mako Mori Test. The developed version of the Mako Mori Test is henceforth renamed the Revised Mako Mori Test, to give it more nuance and scope.



### ***User-friendly***

The concepts around the Revised Mako Mori Test involve a closer consideration of narratological discourse and how to effectively relay the theoretical components in an online popular media context. Although the Revised Mako Mori Test is a more nuanced popular media test in comparison to the original Mako Mori Test, its simplicity is maintained. The new version of this test is intended to be more user-friendly and allow online public participation. The Bechdel Test has been used as an online feature, and is continuously populated because of its mechanistic simplicity and user-friendly characteristics. Simplicity and ease-of-use are desirable features where public involvement in populating data is concerned. In the case of the Revised Mako Mori Test, simplicity serves to aid as a channel between academic positioning, narratological discourse and the continuous popular online discussion around the subject of gender equity in film.

### ***Narrative arc structure***

The Revised Mako Mori Test consists of two components, namely Gustav Freytag's pyramid and a compilation of questions by Trottier (2016). Freytag's pyramid functions as the basis of a narratological structure. Trottier's (2016:n.p.) compilation of questions in his book, *The Screenwriters' Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting and Selling Your Script*, serves as the data points on the narrative arc. As a Hollywood scriptwriter, Trottier created a set of formative questions as an analytical device to assess whether a character has agency and acts as a developing character with a substantial character arc. The amalgamation of Freytag's pyramid with Trottier's set of questions (data points) creates the criteria which function as a questionnaire.

Both mechanisms, as components of a quantifiable narrative model, have narratological limitations and demarcations. The necessity of a narrative structure is, even so, recognised by Freytag (MacEwan 1895:1) in his book *Der Technik des Dramas*, as he states "that the technique of the drama is nothing absolute and unchangeable [and] scarcely need be stated." The restrictions or delimitations of any narrative model are recognised, however Freytag (1863:4 Translated MacEwan1895:4) furthermore supports the necessity of a formative narrative structure in stating that

In later times such a limitation is considered a hindrance to a versatile development. But even we Germans might be well content with the unappreciative judgement of posterity if we only possessed now the aid of a generally useful technique. We suffer from the opposite of narrow limitations, the lack of proper restraint, lack of form, a popular style, a definite range of dramatic material, firmness of grasp; our work has become in all directions casual and uncertain.

The limitations of measurability in a structural visual aid for the narrative arc points to the contextual necessity of “the aid of a generally useful technique”, as Freytag notes in the writing of his contemporaries. However, the requirement for such a diagram or model can still be justified if a measurable analysis and output are required. Freytag’s need to eradicate “casualty” and “uncertainty” resulted in a narrative arc allowing for a visual understanding of the basic five components of that narrative arc. These components are the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement, and are integrated into the Revised Mako Mori Test, as a schematic narrative delineation.

Freytag’s (1895:2) awareness of the limitations such a model can hold is clear when he states

The poet of the present is inclined to look with amazement upon a method of work in which the structure of scenes, the treatment of characters, and the sequence of effects were governed by a transmitted code of fixed technical rules. Such a limitation easily seems to us the death of free artistic creation...Even an elaborate system of specific rules, a certain limitation, founded in popular custom, as to choice of material and structure of the piece, have been at different periods the best aid to creative power.

### ***Dramatic visualisation and analysis***

The Revised Mako Mori Test provides a measurable “aid to creative power” (Freytag 1863:4) as an awareness stimulus, and structure for critical thinking around gender equity in film. As Kremer (2009:70-71) says of Freytag’s pyramid, considering the ubiquity of his [Freytag’s] work to this day, he was very successful in achieving his goal. There is no need to slavishly follow this particular method, but it can inspire us to devise our own methodology to suit our own needs.

Kremer (2009:70) continues with a reminder of the creative ambiguity of diagrams and tests by stating that

Restriction is the enemy of creativity. At least arbitrary restriction is...As a device for forming an interesting dramatic construction, the pyramid is hopelessly restrictive and oversimplified. But the pyramid's value is not one of dramatic creation; rather, it is a tool for *dramatic visualisation and analysis*.

The function of Freytag's pyramid is mainly a visual presentation of a description of a film's narrative arc. It is a method to visually account for the technical components of the storyline.

### ***Points of data***

The questions (points of data) (Trottier 2016:n.p.) as seen in Diagram 3.3 are integrated into the three acts of the five components of Freytag's Pyramid:

Act 1 (Exposition) lays out the first four questions, namely (1) Is the character arc established? (2) Is the character confronted by an inciting incident/ catalyst? (3) Is the character confronted by a dramatic question? and (4) Is the character rising in action?

Act 2 (Rising action and Climax) looks at two questions, namely (5) is the character attempting to resolve the problem initiated by the first turning point? and (6) Is the character learning new skills, discovering her capabilities or experiencing a raised self-awareness?

Act 3 (Falling action and Denouement) looks at the last four questions: (7) Does the character have a new sense of who she is becoming? (8) Is the character awakening and experiencing a higher level of self-awareness? (9) Has the character changed since the beginning? And lastly, (10) Has the dramatic question been resolved by the character?

The questions (points of data) are constructed along a sliding scale from 1-10 but, in accordance with the narrative arc requirements, not all areas of the narrative arc have similar levels. The exposition has a sliding scale of 1-2, the rising action a level of 1-8, the climax from 1-10, the falling action of 1-8 and the denouement a

level of 1-5. These sliding scale levels are set according to Freytag's pyramid and the substantive concentration of each level's dramatic development, thus emulating the pyramid in a questionnaire. The assessment of the selected levels is reliant on the interjection of an online audience and can be populated according to the degree of assessment made per film.

For the purpose of this thesis, the three films assessed in Chapter 4 have been evaluated as an example of the Revised Mako Mori Test's assessment value, and is an exemplary singular assessment. The Revised Mako Mori Test is intended to be utilised as an online popular media test similar to the Bechdel Test as an awareness stimulus around gender equity in film.

EXPOSITION	ACT 1									
	Question 1. Is the character arc established?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 2. Is the character confronted by an inciting incident/ catalyst incident?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 3. Is the character confronted by a dramatic question?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 4. Is the character rising in action?									
RISING ACTION & CLIMAX	ACT 2									
	Question 5. Rising Action Is the character attempting to resolve the problem initiated by the first turning point (Question 3)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 6. Climax Is the character learning new skills, discovering her capabilities or have a raised self-awareness?									
FALLING ACTION	ACT 3									
	Question 7. Does the character have a new sense of who she is becoming?									

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DENOUEMENT	Question 8. Is the character awakening and experiencing a higher level of self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 9. Has the character changed since the beginning (Question 1)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 10. Has the dramatic question been resolved by the character?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

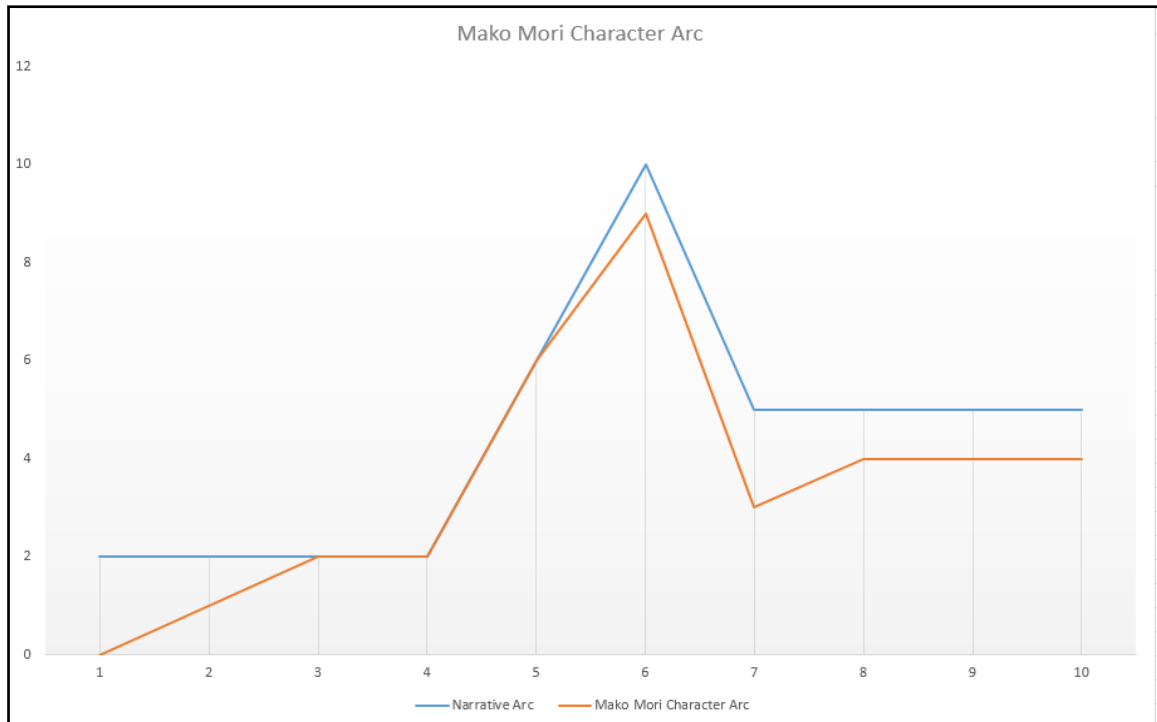
**Diagram 3.2. Revised Mako Mori Test Sliding-scale**

Source: Questionnaire compiled from questions in: Trottier, 2016. *The Screenwriters' Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting and Selling your Script.* (5th ed.) Los Angeles: Silman-James Press.

### 3.5.2 A Primary Focus on a Female Protagonist's Agency in the Development of the Revised Mako Mori Test

#### ***Narrative and character arc***

The original suggestion for the Mako Mori Test (Chaila 2013:n.p.) refers to a character's narrative arc. To clearly differentiate between the narrative arc of the film and the narrative arc of a character, the term "character arc", as it relates to the female protagonists, is used instead in the Revised Mako Mori Test. The term "narrative arc", therefore, refers to the development of the plot of the film, and "character arc" to the development of the character's narrative arc. This differentiation assists with the identification of the two different arcs, showing the proximity and relationship of both arcs.



**Diagram 3.3. Mako Mori's character arc (*Pacific Rim*)**

### ***Revolve and involve***

The requirement for the female protagonist's character arc not to revolve around the character arc of a male protagonist relates to the power dynamic and relationships around character development. The female protagonist's character arc, should not *revolve* around a male character's arc, but may *involve* the male character's arc. Semantically, the difference between "revolve" and "involve", refers to the significance of, and the proximity to, a male protagonist as the actualisation of a female protagonist's character arc. The Revised Mako Mori Test, however, requires a more prominent paradigm shift towards the development and agency of the female protagonist. In this case, the relationship to a male protagonist needs further devolvement for the female protagonist to function beyond the implied gender-binary of the Mako Mori Test.

This devolving shift is clarified through a semantic context of "revolve" and "involve". "Revolve" (Longman Dictionary 2012:1499) is defined as "hav[ing] something as a main subject or purpose", whereas "involve" (Longman Dictionary 2012:929) is defined as "to include or affect someone or something" or "to take part

actively in a particular activity". A focus on inclusivity of action shows that "revolve" considers centrality, whereas "involve" considers participation.

The third requirement of the Mako Mori Test, namely that a female character's arc is one "that is not about supporting a man's story" (Geek Feminism Wiki 2017:n.p.), highlights the absence of a "revolve"-proximity requirement. A female character's arc does not revolve around a male, but allows an "involve"-proximity of the male protagonist. Any male-female binary is counteracted by the prerequisite for a completely absent "revolve"-proximity dynamic. The focus on the female protagonist's character arc should instead act as a replacement for a male-female-orientated-binary and power proximity. The focus is thus on the relation of the female protagonist's character arc to the narrative arc of the film.

The Revised Mako Mori Test involves a focus on the agency of the female protagonist's character arc as it relates to the narrative arc of the film. The measurable proximity of the female character's arc (Diagram 3.3) to the film's narrative arc is related to her agency, especially in relation to the plot of the film. Diagram 3.3 is an example of Mako Mori's character arc in the film *Pacific Rim* (further analysed in Chapter 4) and shows how her character arc (orange line) relates to the narrative arc (blue line) of the film.

### **Diagram components**

The Revised Mako Mori Test diagram uses two series lines of ten data points to visually compare the film's narrative arc (blue) with the character arc of the female protagonist (orange). The data points in the series lines are connected as a visual interpretation of an arc to demonstrate the proximity and substance of the character arc to the narrative arc, with no effect on the data.

The blue series line (narrative arc) is constant and immovable, and is a maximum benchmark for the character arc's substance. In other words, the character arc series line cannot be greater than the narrative arc, and can only move below the blue series line, or partially or completely rest on top of it. This relational proximity is provided according to the information in the questionnaire (Diagram 3.3) and translated into this visual diagram (Diagram 4.1). It shows how the female

protagonist's character arc moves closer to or further from the film's narrative arc (proximity), depending on the substance of her character. The substance of her character (vertical axis) is worked out according to the ten data points, and requires the viewer's observational and analytical skills to populate the results.

The narrative arc of the film (horizontal axis) follows Freytag's pyramid as a time-frame (duration of the film) along which the female protagonist's character arc is developed. Ideally, the female protagonist's character arc (orange series line) should be assembled, or as close to, the narrative arc (blue series line), representing maximum agency for the female protagonist's character arc. If the narrative arc and character arc convene altogether, the result shows a full character power- and agency measurement.

### ***Time***

The Revised Mako Mori Test's primary focus is on the substance and agency of the character, rather than the speaking time of the characters or film duration (time axis). There is therefore no particular measurement of speaking time in the Revised Mako Mori Test. The Revised Mako Mori Test, in comparison to the Geena Davis-Inclusion Quotient (which measures screen and speaking time), only considers the effect of time on the female protagonist's character arc.

One aspect which refers to the influence of time (the amount of time the female protagonist spends on-screen) is the substance the female protagonist's character demonstrates, depending on the on-screen time her character is given. On-screen time relates to her development, her power position and how she accelerates the plot of the film. The Revised Mako Test instead considers the substance of the content of her speaking-time, as lengthy dialogue does not necessarily equate to substance. However, time expended on the film's narrative arc essentially equates to a form of power, as the film's narrative arc directly relates to the plot, which serves the purpose of character development and agency. A character's development is more overt when they are viewed in action on the narrative arc and on-screen, rather than off-screen and in silence.



The Revised Mako Mori Test is therefore a popular media test that visually indicates a measurable assessment of a female protagonist's character arc. The data can be populated open-endedly, as its potential and consequent results are optimally reached via a cyber-platform as a means to develop the debate according to online and Cyberfeminist discourse.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

Popular media tests, such as the Revised Mako Mori Test, are a measurable, composite of feminist- and narratological discourse, which is delineated in the context of Cyberfeminism. It assesses gender equity through the hybridisation of Freytag's Pyramid and Trottier's set of questions (points of data). This functions as a quantifiable measure of a female protagonist's character arc in film through a visual diagram. The protagonist's agency is determined through the proximity of her character arc to the narrative arc of the film, presenting a non-binary, and focalised visual. The impact and the relation of her character arc on the film's narrative arc is consequently indicated. This power dynamic relates to the functionality of the narrative arc of a film as a power base, which allows the female protagonist to show her aptitude as a "character" and not merely an "actor".

The Revised Mako Mori Test can function through the Internet as a channel for the development of the digital humanities and online feminist discourse. It can occur in conjunction with popular media as an outline for a participating, transnational population. Likening tests such as the Revised Mako Mori Test to the original popular media test, namely the Bechdel Test, is evidence of how dialogue and participation around online popular media tests expand. Deficits in the representation of female characters in film, and in the structuring of popular media tests, are considered. The Mako Mori Test was suggested because a structural inadequacy was observed through the Bechdel Test when Mako Mori (*Pacific Rim*, 2013) as a Japanese protagonist, failed the Bechdel Test. This occurred despite a pronounced development of her character in the context of intersectional representation in Hollywood. The development of popular media tests around intersectionality is an imminent objective. Feminism needs to steer towards a more inclusive establishment of diverse female representation in online popular media.

Feminism, as a movement, can assure more traction through a technology-based and transnational reach, in particular if measurable, and quantifiable gender equity goals are considered to dissuade critique against superficial undertakings and misplaced crusading. Communal online platforms provide a cyberspace of participation, evaluation and interactive considerations around female representation in film. It is an assessable and evolving form of communal collaboration around issues that relate to gender imbalances in Hollywood. Through popular media tests as a form of gender equity awareness, an online educational goal is reached which acts as part of a public participation and spectator response.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN ASSESSED VIA THE REVISED MAKO MORI TEST

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mako Mori Test's assessment criteria are anchored in the character arc of the male and female protagonists, the probability of a relation between their character arcs and the nature of its relation. The requirements of the Mako Mori Test, namely that there should be: (a) at least one female character, (b) who gets her own narrative arc; and (c) and that is not about supporting a man's story (Geek Feminism Wiki n.d.:n.p.) necessitate a female protagonist to "action" her own character arc. Her arc is preferably independent of a male protagonist's arc and should not merely exist within the film's narrative arc to support the male protagonist's character arc. The relation of the character arcs, and the requirements for a female character arc in this media test, infer that the female character's arc intrinsically displays a value in terms of her own independence, strength and development.

The sample of three female characters discussed in this thesis, namely Mako Mori (*Pacific Rim*, 2013), Ellen Ripley (*Aliens*, 1986) and Imperator Furiosa (*Mad Max: Fury Road*, 2015), are referred to as "strong" super action female characters. Their character arcs display development independent of the relevant male protagonists. These women also have evidential strength and substance embedded in their character arcs which can be detected through the dialogue in the film. Their substance confirms the already existing agency in their character arcs, beyond the limitations of the respective film's time spectrum and narrative arc. The viewer is also assured, from the female character arc section viewed throughout the film that these female characters have already previously been functioning in their respective ranks. The films' narrative arcs therefore, further extend the development and growth of the female characters' arcs and agency. It occurs with the necessary dramatic display, as a requirement of narratological stipulations.

Considering Ellen Ripley's agency and character arc, it is apt to note that she is also referred to as 'the first action heroine' (Brooks 2009: n.p.). Ripley is today regarded as an iconic revolutionary character, as she was an action heroine during a time where males dominated the science fiction-genre<sup>4</sup>. Her role was, in fact, written for a male character but it was consequently decided to cast a female character instead. Sigourney Weaver claimed in an interview (Creighton 2015: n.p.) that "bosses only cast a woman because they thought it would be more surprising when she survived." Although this reflects the thinking around action female characters in the 1970s, it opened up a crucial door for strong action female protagonists, curtailing the typical ending for female characters of the time. Vital aspects of Ripley's character are that she is a survivor, has no romantic interests (shows her independently developing character arc), and she is one of two female members of their eight-member-strong squad. She is the only character that displays the foresight and logic towards the dangers the alien holds. Her character arc displays agency, from the exposition of the film *Aliens*, until the denouement (Figure A) where she outlives a crew of one woman, other than herself, and six men.

Mako Mori (*Pacific Rim*) on the other hand, is hailed by her contemporary fans as one of the few strong Japanese female characters, therefore iconic, but far less celebrated in Hollywood than for example, Ellen Ripley. Referring to Mako Mori's character, Lavender (2017:213) states that

Mako represents one of the very few Asian women in post-World War II American filmmaking who is *not* a prostitute, is not evil, and is *not* dead by the end.

White female protagonists were allowed to live until the end of action science fiction films in the 1970s, but Asian action female characters only experienced that privilege almost four decades later.

In the exposition of the film *Pacific Rim*, Mako Mori is introduced as one of the brightest in the Jaeger programme, and shows 51/ 51 kills in her simulator training. She also assesses the new fighter pilots in the programme, becomes a Jaeger pilot,

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<sup>4</sup> Some 1970s science fiction films which include a male-dominated cast include *The Andromeda Strain*, *Soylent Green*, *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Star Wars*.

defeats the kaiju and destroys the breach. The victorious destruction of the breach is done in cooperation with Raleigh Beckett, as a jaeger can only be piloted by two pilots who share a neural bridge called “drifting”. Her character is the impetus for the development of the Mako Mori Test and responsible for a robust Japanese-American female fan-base which guaranteed Del Toro (director of *Pacific Rim*) great success in the Asian target market.

Imperator Furiosa, as the female protagonist in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, is revealed in the exposition as the character who dominates the film’s narrative arc through her own strong character arc. She is an assertive, quick-thinking leader, is strategically capable, skilled in combat as a warrior, and overthrows Immortan Joe’s wasteland empire by derailing, and finally killing him. The denouement of the film is open-ended as to how the dictatorial, patriarchal empire will continue in terms of a ruling power. Imperator Furiosa, though, is clearly shown as a potential leader for the people, as she brings the literally faceless Immortan Joe back to the Citadel. Another power relation between the male protagonist, Mad Max and Imperator Furiosa (female protagonist), shows moments of equilibrium in-between survivalist power displays. Imperator Furiosa predominantly takes charge of the narrative arc of the film, with Mad Max at the wheel only when necessary to her mission. Imperator Furiosa’s relevance as a strong action female protagonist is underlined chiefly by her “hijacking” the *Mad Max: Fury Road* narrative arc. She replaces the male protagonist driving the plot and her character arc becomes predominant.

The selection of these three strong action females reflects demanding male-female power relations, and independent development of the respective female character arcs. This not in support of the male character arcs, but rather in parallel development to or altogether independently developed and developing from the male character arcs. The female character arcs do not answer to the male character arcs, but rather amalgamate with them, as necessary for the greater good. The male and female characters stand together for the principles needed to achieve victory against external onslaughts of injustice and hostility. All three female characters are therefore prime examples of successful Mako Mori Test achievers, displaying the relevant characteristics to manage an independent character arc.

## 4.2 HASKELL AND THE SUPERWOMEN (STRONG ACTION WOMEN) IN POST-APOCALYPTIC SCIENCE FICTION

In her book, *From Reverence to Rape. Female Stars of the 1940s*, Molly Haskell (1973) identifies and extrapolates the “strong” or “extraordinary” woman, in response to the objectification of female characters during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her work in part lays a foundation for feminist film criticism through categorisation. Although Haskell’s form of categorisation is carried through to the late 20<sup>th</sup> - early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the shape of the Bechdel and Mako Mori Tests, it was not populated and applied in a similar fashion, but rather used theoretically. Haskell’s classification of women during the 1970s emphasised a need for gender categorisation in the representation of women. The context of this categorisation showed the substance women had to offer in the narrative arc of a film. Revisiting her critique in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still relevant, as the role of women in film is continuously under scrutiny insofar as substance, motivation, and agency are concerned. The categorisation of female characters in film is unrelenting, and thus ostensibly an attempt to create a purported “sliding scale” of substance and role identification. In all likelihood, it is not only to understand the positional power of the female protagonist as she is represented in the narrative arc of a film, but also her position and place in society.

Haskell’s mid-20<sup>th</sup> century identification of different types of women relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century women in film, where similar types can still be identified. Her descriptions cannot entirely fulfil the full set of characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century representation of female characters in film as contemporary females have a different reading. The representation of women, in particular strong super action women, has extended into alternative categories since her identification. For the purpose of investigating the relevance of various categorisations, Haskell’s “types” will be addressed.

The sample of female protagonists discussed in this thesis foundationally relates to the identification of superwomen as described by Haskell (1973:505). Her attempt at categorising women may function as a dichotomous mechanism to demarcate women as fulfilling a particular role or place. It may also serve to reiterate the need

for female representation that presents characters with an active, individualised character arc. Haskell's categorisation serves as a platform from which adjectives such as "strong" or "super" can function, as she attempts to group certain characteristics at various levels of substance in a character. Identification furthermore functions as a necessary awareness of how female characters relate to male protagonists in film, especially in the context of agency and power relations between these characters. These male-female power relations can impact on the strong action female character's arc.

Haskell (1973:505) discusses women in terms of "a woman holding her own in a man's world", thus, how a woman exerts her power in relation to men in a patriarchal system. In this framework she identifies various categories of women: she looks at the "extraordinary women", women who according to Haskell (1973:505) "were tortured and frustrated", hence, the "neurotic woman", finding no outlet for her brains or talent except as wife and mother, dissipates her energies, diverts them, or goes outside [of] society." Another category, the "superfemale" is "a woman who, while exceedingly "feminine" and flirtatious, is too ambitious and intelligent for the docile role society has decreed she play. She is uncomfortable, but not uncomfortable enough to rebel completely: her circumstances are too pleasurable". Lastly, Haskell (1973:505) describes the "superwoman" as "a woman who, like the "superfemale", has a high degree of intelligence or imagination, but instead of exploiting her femininity, adopts male characteristics in order to enjoy male prerogatives, or merely to survive".

The female characters discussed in this thesis (Ellen Ripley, Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa), can broadly be described as superwomen in terms of their collective characteristics and activities. The term superwoman, however, as it serves these particular female characters, needs to be adjusted in relation to the setting of the selected films: *Pacific Rim*, *Aliens* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. They are cast in various science fiction settings, which as a geo-political factor, has an impact on the existing power structures of patriarchy, also consequently affecting the categorisation of superwomen. The patriarchal structure as presented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century films Haskell reviewed, is, in these selected films, either under threat, or has been largely or completely dislodged. The science fiction superwomen such

as Mako Mori, Emperor Furiosa and Ellen Ripley function in a world that cannot be claimed by men alone, but also by external factors such as Kaiju, aliens and drought. The science fiction structure, to a large extent, flouts the 20<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal system Haskell discusses, giving rise to a setting that allows for female characters to exert individual power and agency, beyond the known patriarchal structure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The possibilities of a science fiction narrative structure weakens and places pressure on the male power structure. As it is presented, it has to battle external forces beyond normative earthly means, hence allowing potential for gender equilibrium. The feminist science fiction subgenre of the 1970s also acknowledges the post-apocalyptic or dystopian setting as a potential platform for gender equity.

Elyce Rae Leford (2005:290) states that:

Science fiction and fantasy serve as important vehicles for feminist thought, particularly as bridges between theory and practice. No other genres so actively invite representations of the ultimate goals of feminism: worlds free of sexism, worlds in which women's contributions (to science) are recognised and valued, worlds that explore the diversity of women's desire and sexuality, and worlds that move beyond gender.

The potential of science fiction settings allows for “fantastical” and imaginary representations. It includes the alternative roles and functionality of female characters beyond the restrictions and prescriptions of a patriarchal system. The description of Haskell's (1973:505) superwoman “exploiting her femininity, adopt[ing] male characteristics in order to enjoy male prerogatives, or merely to survive,” is appropriate in terms of the survival ability of these female characters. Combating ferocious aliens (Ellen Ripley in *Aliens*), charging over a desolate wasteland in a war-rig (Imperator Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road*) and being at the helm of a fighter programme against colossal dinosaur-hybrid aliens (Mako Mori in *Pacific Rim*) require these superwomen to exert physical and cognitive strategies beyond merely “a woman holding her own in a man's world”. Their survival in a hostile environment and the survival of others inherently depends on their range of skills, within a strongly developed and active character arc.



Haskell's description of "male characteristics" in this context is a matter of necessary performativity (Butler 1990:25), and not a gender orientation or goal. The reality of these science fiction female characters as warriors, survivors and strategists is based on environmental necessity. The science fiction environment, therefore, allows for female characters to exert similar energy and skills to stereotypical male characteristics without issues of a male-orientated gender preference. These female characters are, first and foremost, individuals negotiating survival in a hostile environment, and they have to execute the necessary skill-set in order to overcome the probability of death. Their adaptive "traditional" male characteristics are thus coincidental, and of necessity in order to survive in this environment.

#### **4.2.1 Issues around Strong Action Female Characters**

Although binary-models such as "male-female" are restrictive and limiting in relation to 21<sup>st</sup>-century gender studies, the existence of a binary view towards male and female characters in film cannot be disputed. A male-female approach towards protagonists in film, with an awareness of applied semantic categorisation, assists in understanding how strong action female characters are created and assessed. This is applied in relation to a male protagonist, and also from the viewer's point of view. Mulvey (1975:58) states, in terms of the viewer's perception, that it may be "reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him". The viewer's background knowledge informs the viewer's observation of the female protagonist represented in the film. Applied semantic categorisation is therefore a system of identification and interpretation utilised by individuals in various roles such as the writer, the director and viewer. A semantic categorisation of female characters is not further developed in this thesis, but has potential for further research.

The relationship of strong action females towards male protagonists in film and the ideological position they take in relation to the binary model sliding scale, as discussed by Bal (2009:130), shows how categorisation models of a female character add meaning to how she is represented. The representation of the strong action female in film functions in relation to what her representation reveals about

the society which creates and views her character, and how her character is placed on the semantic axes. Bal (2009:127) describes semantic axes as a structuralist principle with “pairs of contrary meanings” (Bal 2009:130-131), pointing out that the position of a female protagonist on a sliding scale of a semantic axis can convey meaning around her ideological stance. This sliding scale would, for example, refer to particular characteristics relating to the female protagonist, such as ‘strength’ and how it features in the narrative arc. Placing a strong action female character on a binary “male-female” axis and analysing characteristics such as “strength” in relation to the male protagonist reveals the ideological position of both characters and the narrative arc of the film.

The ideological position of characters can speak to power relations, as well as how a character’s power or agency in a film reveals socio-political viewpoints around the role or position of females in a society. Gender politics are thus executed in terms of the power relations between male and female protagonists. It inherently portrays how the narrative arc of a particular film positions itself in socio-political ideology and its gender politics. This consideration is relevant when discussing the sample of strong super action females in this thesis. A character’s relation to ideologies in film reiterates that “a character is a construct not a person” (Bal 2009:123-4). A character is inherently created within an ideology, and constructed according to aspects and characteristics of the ideology in which she functions. A female character thereby represents theories and principles of a particular setting and worldview.

The strong action females of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa, superseded by strong action females such as Ellen Ripley, can be assessed through the “male-female” semantic axis in relation to their ideological positions on the “strength” characteristic sliding scale. Their relation to the male protagonists in terms of “strength” includes agency and subjectivity as part of power relations.

Power, according to Foucault (1982:410), is a relation. Power is not a thing, and it is a relation between two individuals...such that one can direct the behaviour of another or determine the behaviour of another.

The binary “male-female” axis demonstrates the power relation and dynamic between male and female protagonists, indicating measures of agency and subjectivity in this relation. Smelik (1998:3) states that

The process of becoming-subject is taken up in a network of power relations of which sexual difference is a major constitutive factor along others like race, class, sexual preference, age. Subjectivity both constitutes and is constituted by a set of agencies and experiences as well as by external material conditions. The consciousness of sexual difference may in some cases encourage the female subject to change her own conditions and those of other women. The experience can be both productive of and conducive to political agency.

Political agency, for example, as shown by Imperator Furiosa (*Mad Max: Fury Road*), is a realisation that change is required to alter a superimposed, patriarchal societal hierarchy. She forcefully breaks away, stealing Immortan Joe’s five wives as a method of reform for herself and other women. It is a productive act of change as Furiosa effectively overthrows the patriarchal power system, thus becoming-subject.

### **4.3 MAKO MORI’S CHARACTER ARC IN *PACIFIC RIM***

#### **4.3.1 Background and Fabula of *Pacific Rim***

Before discussing the fabula of *Pacific Rim* (2013), it is necessary to revisit the significance of the film, and Mako Mori’s role as an Asian female protagonist in the context of Hollywood. Crutch (2013:n.p.) underlines the importance of Mako Mori as an empowered, distinguished Asian female character standing in relation to Raleigh Beckett, a white male protagonist. Crutch (2013:n.p.) states that:

In light of Hollywood’s long history of portraying Asian women as subservient, submissive, sexualized objects, Mako’s treatment is especially subversive. In addition to the equal status suggested by her Drift compatibility with Raleigh, the film supports her power and importance through more subtle devices...The film essentially uses the audience’s identification with its white, male hero to convince them that Mako is the best character in the movie.

Croutch's discussion on how Asian gender and intersectionality are frequently stereotyped in Hollywood resonates with the necessity for these issues to be revisited and discussed. The perception with which *Pacific Rim* is viewed lends an impetus to consider Mako Mori as a strong female protagonist. Lavender (2017:213) underlines the response to Mako Mori as a Japanese heroine by emphasising that

Japanese-American fans were vocal in expounding the cultural resonances of a bilingual heroine who is not shamed for using imperfect English or dropping back into Japanese and calling her mentor "sensei".

The unexpected and overwhelming viewer response to her character shows an overdue development of a strong intersectional heroine with appropriate resonance for a Japanese or American-Japanese female viewership.

*Pacific Rim* introduces the viewer to a futuristic war on Earth between the Kaiju – gigantic, dinosaur-like monsters, materialising from an interdimensional portal in the Pacific Ocean – and the Jaegers. The mega-humanoid Jaegers are a part of The Mark III programme. Each Jaeger is controlled by two drift-compatible pilots, which make the pilots rare specialists. The two drift-compatible Beckett brothers, Raleigh and his older brother Yancy, are commandeered to protect Anchorage in their Jaeger, Gypsy Danger, from a Kaiju named Knifehead, but Yancy gets killed during this mission. Raleigh is traumatised by his brother's death, which he cognitively and emotionally experienced via the drift, and retires from the fighting programme. Marshal Stacker Pentecost, Mako Mori's stepfather, calls on Raleigh Beckett, re-recruiting him for the Mark III programme where Raleigh meets with Mako Mori, his assessor and the director of the Jaeger restoration programme.

Mako Mori shows her prowess as a Ranger in the fighter pilot programme during a training session with Raleigh. She explains that she is unimpressed by his training session, as his inability to use the best tactics for each pertinent moment affects his skillfulness. Her perfect score of "fifty-one drops and fifty-one kills" in the Jaeger simulator, tells of her exceptional capacity and insight as a fighter pilot. During the combat training, Raleigh realises that Mako Mori is more than his equal, and more so, that they are drift compatible. Irrespective, Stacker refuses Mako Mori's request

to become Raleigh's co-pilot and Mako Mori accepts with dignified respect. Eventually, Stacker allows Mako Mori to fight alongside Raleigh, but a training session in the Gypsy Danger Conn-Pod, where Raleigh latches onto his memory of his brother's death, derails Mako Mori into her own memories of the day her parents died in the attack on the Kaiju Onibaba. Directly after this incident, LOCCENT detect two Kaiju signals: Otachi and Leatherback. Heedless of Mako Mori's botched simulator experience, Pentecost unwillingly sends Raleigh and Beckett to fight the Kaijus, as the Kaijus had managed to get the upper hand on three other Jaegers, killing some of their pilots.

Mako Mori and Raleigh are sent out to fight Leatherback, where a lengthy battle ensues. The two pilots use the Plasmacaster, shooting into the Kaiju's stomach, killing it. They follow another Kaiju, Otachi, and another fight ensues. Eventually, after attacking the Kaiju with various means, Mako Mori decides upon a chain sword, killing Otachi by cutting it in half. Striker sends more Jaegers to destroy the Breach, and Mako Mori and Raleigh once again participate victoriously, using a thermonuclear bomb and destroying the Breach. The film ends with both Raleigh and Mako Mori wait for Raleigh's lifepod to be taken to safety by a helicopter.

#### **4.3.2 Intersectionality and the Need for a Japanese Heroine**

The requirement and viewer urgency for a strong female Japanese character in Hollywood was shown in the response, not only to *Pacific Rim* failing the Bechdel Test, but in online articles and blog discussions about Mako Mori as a strong Japanese female protagonist.

An example of such a response is that of an online blogger, Bedlamsbard's blog post (2013:n.p) *On Mako Mori and Rinko Kikuchi in Pacific Rim*. Bedlamsbard (a pseudonym) describes herself as a 23-year old Japanese-American woman, digitally diarising her thoughts around Mako Mori as a Japanese female protagonist. She writes on her cinematic viewer experience of Mako Mori:

I watch, if not a lot, a fair amount of movies a year. I can't think of a single big name movie...where the lead female Japanese character is actually played by a Japanese actress... *Pacific Rim* is the only big-name movie I have ever seen that

actually cast a Japanese woman as a Japanese woman.... this was the first time in my life that I have gone to a movie theatre, that I've sat down, that I've looked at the screen, and I've seen someone who not only looks like me, but has some of the verbal and physical tics that I and my mother have... All I know is that for the first time in my life I walked into a theatre and the lead actress was someone who looked like me. And that's kind of a big deal.

Bedlamsbard shows an authentic response to the representation of Japanese women in Hollywood films and how female representation in a film has an immense impact on individual women. Her response that, for the first time in her life she viewed a female protagonist resembling herself, has a tone of admiration and recognition.

Here Mulvey's questions (1978:11) "What would women's culture practice be like?" and "What would art and literature within an ideology that did not oppress women be like?" are relevant. The female viewer displays a response to a representational and changing ideology she can finally relate to. Her awareness of how a Japanese female character has been re-represented in *Pacific Rim* reflects on her previous experiences as a viewer, indicating a lack of association or conscious/ unconscious dissociation with those characters. Bedlamsbard's reaction to Mako Mori answers Mulvey's questions, as a new ideology would be a viewer's connection or relation to the character on screen. In other words, a feminist ideology that does not oppress women through the negotiations of the male-gaze, but rather an association of a female viewer with the female character. The shift from a heterosexual male gaze to a feminist orientation of female representation is thus more exemplary. A Japanese woman would, in the aforementioned, be stereotypically eroticised. Now instead, with the female character's substance and agency in mind (Mako Mori), a connection and relation of female viewers with the female protagonists on screen is produced. Bedlamsbard's recognition as a viewer (2013:n.p.) of an authentic Japanese heroine needs further evaluation as a reaction to modes of representation but for the purpose of this thesis, it will not be explored in depth.

Mulvey (1978:112) states that "in proportion to women's exclusion from cultural participation, their image has been stolen and their bodies exploited."

Bedlamsbard's blog reaction corresponds with Mulvey's observation that women's images have been stolen. Bedlamsbard's response towards Mako Mori reveals a viewer's revelation of a first-time recognition of her own image in a female character. Female representation in film consequently accounts for the experience of female viewers and their relation and connection to the female protagonists. This experience positions the viewer's relation to her own image and person. In this instance of intersectionality, the lack of representation of a broad spectrum of women in Hollywood, and furthermore a lack of true representation of women of various races, is evident. Smelik (1998:8) reiterates the need for a female viewer to authentically associate with female characters through stating that she

... believe[s] that the struggle for equality is not yet over and the demand for authentic recognition is still heard today. Female spectators want to be able to identify with lifelike heroines without having to be annoyed by sexist clichés or transported by hyperbolical stereotypes.

As an American-Japanese woman, Bedlamsbard's blog reiterates how the representation of women in film needs to be repositioned to an inclusive intersectional awareness, with a discernment of the film industry's female viewership.

#### **4.3.3 Power Relation between Mako Mori and Raleigh's Character Arcs: The Drift as Metaphor for Male-Female Symbiosis beyond Gender**

A pertinent feature in the narrative arc of *Pacific Rim* is the pilots' neural-compatibility in simultaneous combat during the oceanic conflict against the Kaijus. This cognitive connection, called 'the drift', allows for two Jaeger pilots (a Jaeger must be piloted by two compatible individuals) to be successful co-pilots, especially if this bond is exceptionally strong. The male and female protagonists, Raleigh and Mako Mori, through a preliminary physical training session, reveal their vital drift compatibility. Albeit through an initial dilemma with their simulation training, they become victoriously unified Jaeger pilots.



The definition of the drift is described as a “neural handshake” or “a completely shared cognitive space” (Ask Science Fiction, Xeans 2016:n.p.). Guillermo del Toro (*Pacific Rim*’s director) (2012:n.p.) describes the drift as “a type of Mind Meld that requires the pilots to share memories, instinct and emotions. Drifting allows them to act as a controlled and unified movement of the Jaeger itself, one pilot controlling the ‘right hemisphere’, the other the ‘left hemisphere’”. The drift is orientated towards cerebral compatibility and aptitude which indicate a fine balance between cognitive power and vulnerability.

The vulnerable component of the drift amounts to a certain inner courage, as each individual needs to be adequately brave and open enough to let their partner into their subconscious and buried memories. The vulnerable entry into another individual’s mind and psyche, for the sake of a paired, yet unified combating machine, requires unequalled focus, great sensitivity and excludes any form of apprehension. This congruent state is described as co-pilots who “get high sync ratios with the Jaeger, itself, but also happen to have mental structures that are close enough to remove any ‘noise’ or ‘contradiction’ between [them]” (Ask Science: Fiction, Janitor of the Black Library 2016:n.p.). This finely-balanced element of courageousness without contradiction must be done without any hesitancy, or this could result in a failed Jaeger mission, rendering the gigantic robot redundant.

The relevance of this power relation to the drift is significant in the context of gender equality on Hollywood screens. The drift, as a fighting mechanism, shows no preference for gender, but instead requires the symbiotic amalgamation of two skilled and controlled individuals, irrespective of their gender or sex. The drift, as a foundational requirement for a successful battle of a Jaeger against a Kaiju, can be viewed as a genderless space within the Mark III programme. Here, only the prowess and cognitive, strategic skills of two individuals are required, without any prior assessment of the gender of the pilots. The fact that Mako Mori enters this space as a fully-equipped subject, albeit somewhat contained within a patriarchal science fiction setting, is a much-needed respite from a continuous patriarchal setting for female protagonists to show their steel. Raleigh, as a qualified Ranger (a super Jaeger pilot), does guide Mako Mori throughout the mission, exercising his experience and power within the drift. His mentorship as a co-pilot can be read as



gender power-orientation as he guides Mako Mori through the fighting sequence. It can alternatively be viewed as Raleigh dealing with his brother's death, and redeeming himself from his brother's loss. The drift gives both co-pilots the opportunity to fulfill their character arc's motivation and purpose, allowing for an equal space of character development and mission completion.

Mako Mori, as a determined Ranger apprentice, enters the drift with a substantial list of attributes, revealing complex components of her character. Her attributes are not only limited to her mechanical and engineering skills, with an overall score in the Jaeger simulator of a "51 drop and 51 kills" record. She is also the assessor responsible for compiling a candidate list for Gypsy Danger as part of the Mark III Restoration Project under the Pan Pacific Defense Corps (Fandom 2017:n.p.). Gypsy Danger (the only Jaeger running on two nuclear reactors) with a carefully selected pair of pilots, can be utilised as a powerful weapon. Her motivational drive to become a Ranger is based in the childhood tragedy of the loss of both her parents in a Kaiju attack. This acts as the undercurrent of her driving force to become a Jaeger pilot, but also shows her unbridled ambition as an individual. Mako Mori enters the drift with all these powerful attributes, making her a visible counterpart and co-pilot in a Jaeger.

The exiting power relation between Mako Mori and Raleigh is that of a neural-circuitry network of two individuals prepared to operate within a structure of vulnerabilities and strengths. Foucault (1980:98) states that: "Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain...Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application." The drift acts as a literal metaphor of such a power relation. Raleigh and Mako Mori act as the vehicles driving their power relation through a netlike organisation of cognitive-fusion, has an important purpose in a larger organisational network or chain. Their ultimate mission is the destruction of the breach between the alien invaders and planet Earth, which is a protective act of the "organisation". The whole operation relies on their power relation, effectively, for Earth to be saved. The two co-pilots' power balance involves an indispensable cooperative network which results in the success of the Mark III project, emphasising the influential power of individuals in a complex set of relations.

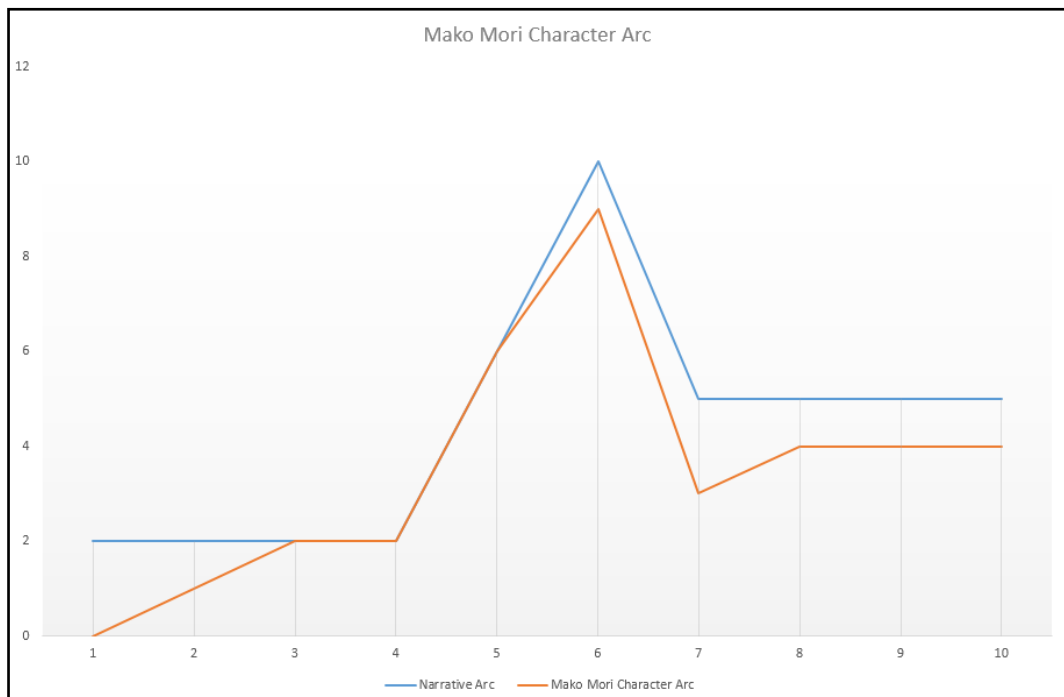
The power of individuals in a network is shown in the simulated drift sequence, when Raleigh is momentarily pushed off a workable neural path due to a memory of his brother's death. Mako Mori is, in turn, pushed off course, loses her focus and instead follows her memory. This trajectory denies her the state of centered equilibrium required to pilot the Jaeger. The recall of Raleigh's memory misdirects Mako Mori towards her own underlying memories and childhood trauma. In this instance the power relation between the two pilots affects their collective behaviour showing, that "power is... a relationship between two individuals... such that one can direct the behaviour of another or determine the behaviour of another" (Foucault 1982:410). This situation almost has a detrimental consequence, as Mako Mori gears up to activate the nuclear arm. It, advantageously, serves as a necessary catalyst to clear her mind of this potent 'white rabbit'- memory.

Mako Mori's battle against her own demons, in the guise of suppressed memories, results in her eventually entering into triumphant combat without any superfluous distractions. The drift therefore serves as a space where Mako Mori has to unequivocally release and confront aspects of her past identity so as to achieve a state of inner equilibrium, which directs her towards her ultimate goal: becoming a fully-fledged Ranger pilot.

<b>EXPOSITION</b>	<b>ACT 1</b>									
	<b>Question 1</b> Is the character arc established?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 2</b> Is the character confronted by an inciting incident/ catalyst incident?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 3</b> Is the character confronted by a dramatic question?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 4</b> Is the character rising in action?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>RISING ACTION &amp; CLIMAX</b>	<b>ACT 2</b>									
	<b>Question 5</b> Is the character attempting to resolve the problem initiated by the first turning-point (Question 3)?									

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 6</b> Is the character learning new skills, discovering her capabilities or having a raised self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
FALLING ACTION	<b>ACT 3</b>									
	<b>Question 7</b> Does the character have a new sense of who she is becoming?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DENOUEMENT	<b>Question 8</b> Is the character awakening and experiencing a higher level of self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 9</b> Has the character changed since the beginning (Question 1)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<b>Question 10</b> Has the dramatic question been resolved by the character?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Diagram 4.1. The Revised Mako Mori Test: Mako Mori's Character Arc and Power Distribution on the Narrative Arc (*Pacific Rim*)**



**Diagram 4.2 Mako Mori's Character Arc in Relation to the Narrative Arc of *Pacific Rim***

An analysis of Mako Mori's character arc through the mechanisms of the Revised Mako Mori Test reveals the proximity of her character arc to the narrative arc. The film's narrative arc functions as a power base, and the proximity of the female protagonist's character arc to the narrative arc reveals her agency. Her power is only evident in some areas of the narrative arc, as her character arc proximity to the narrative arc is not in complete unison, but partial. This proximity reveals that her power as a character, in relation to the narrative arc of the story, is only partial. In the exposition of *Pacific Rim*, the male protagonist, Raleigh Beckett, is introduced as the principle narrator. He recounts his personal background, and through descriptive narration contextualise the setting and back-story of the plot. Raleigh is introduced from the onset of the film and occupies the narrative arc during the exposition (approximately the first sixteen minutes of the film). Mako Mori is only introduced twenty-two minutes into the film, after the male protagonist, Raleigh Beckett's character arc, has been established and introduced. During the rising action of *Pacific Rim* the cognitive fusion of the male and female protagonists (Raleigh and Mako Mori) occur during their training in the drift. The drift, with its potential to be a gender-neutral space, shows Raleigh continuously directing Mako Mori's actions, rather than her sole decision to victoriously gut a kaiju with a sword. This decision directly connects to her character arc as vengeance upon the kaiju for killing parents, thus fulfilling her goal.

The climax of the narrative arc, however, belongs to Raleigh Beckett, as Mako Mori is ejected from the Jaeger prior to Raleigh activating it as a nuclear bomb, thus claiming a final solo victory without her. Stacker Pentecost (Mako Mori's stepfather) also dies a hero during the climax of the film. The significance of two males dominating the climatic function as an important power node disempowers Mako Mori at a crucial part of the narrative arc. The exposition and rising action build towards the climax, which functions as a culminating moment of action and goal-fulfillment. Character occupation during the central stage of the climax reveals a domination of the narrative arc. The climax acts, to a large extent, as a signifier of primary power, and in *Pacific Rim*, Raleigh Beckett and Stacker Pentecost occupy this position.

Mako Mori's character arc loses power moments prior to the climax, and also during the falling action. Her main concern during the falling action is Raleigh Beckett's safety, rather than a reflection on her victory or progress during the narrative. Both protagonists are seen huddling together on the pod during the denouement, but with a slight overtone of Raleigh Beckett being comforted as the hero, irrespective of a nuanced reference to their shared experience during the drift and battle. This analysis of Mako Mori's character arc in relation to the narrative arc as a power base indicates that she is partially positioned as a strong action female character. Her character arc still requires development in relation to the narrative arc of the film, despite the visible development of her character arc.

The Revised Mako Mori test thus shows that Mako Mori's character arc is not introduced in the exposition, but is only established with the commencement of the rising action. During the rising action, Mako Mori's mission is fused with that of Raleigh Beckett, as their unison is required to pilot a Jaeger. There is a development around her background story through a memory flashback (rising action), which allows the viewer to understand the impetus which drives her character arc. Mako Mori, despite full participation in the rising action, has no input on the climatic victory of the narrative arc. Although it is implied that she has acquired the status of a fully-fledged Jaeger pilot, the narrative arc does not show a personal reflection on her character arc (falling action), and instead her main concern resides with Raleigh's safety, subjecting her character arc to that of Raleigh. The denouement continues with her concern for Raleigh, leaving marginal scope for a reflection on her growth and fulfillment of her mission. It is assumed that she quietly shares this knowledge with Raleigh in a brief moment of understanding between them.

Mako Mori's character arc has less significant impact on the narrative arc, in comparison to Raleigh Beckett's character arc, notwithstanding the importance of her position in the film. The Revised Mako More test, therefore, raises awareness as to the representation of Mako Mori as a super action female. The test indicates that aspects of her character could have been further developed through a stronger presence on the narrative arc. It further indicates that the female protagonist's character arc was a strong, but not primary consideration. YouTube contributor

James (1978) and Liveson (2016:n.p.) support this finding in a video *Beyond Mako Mori and her Test: The Representation of East Asian Women* by stating that

The everyday attitude, the mind-set, the paradigm of almost all other media and entertainment is still that any female characters that do actually exist, revolve almost entirely around their male counterparts, or are only there to titillate male members of the audience who are sexually attracted to women.

His discussion of Mako Mori's character and the Mako Mori test, to an extent affirms that her character arc is often subject to the male characters' positions, regardless of her being a strong action female in her own right.

#### **4.4 IMPERATOR FURIOSA'S CHARACTER ARC IN *MAD MAX: FURY ROAD***

##### **4.4.1 Background and Fabula of *Mad Max: Fury Road***

In discussing the fabula of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), a brief reference is made to the three previous films in the *Mad Max* franchise: *Mad Max* (1979), *Mad Max: The Road Warrior* (1981) and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). The first three films in the *Mad Max* franchise position the character Max Rockatansky, a Main Force Patrol officer, as attempting to maintain peace on the roads, as the main protagonist. He is a man who battles the loss of his wife and son in a post-apocalyptic, dystopic world. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* the title acts mainly as a continuum, rather than an indication of Mad Max's role and position.

The female protagonist, Imperator Furiosa, one of Immortan Joe's lieutenants, is introduced very early in the film, indicating prominence. In principle, she dominates the narrative arc of the film, marginalising Max Rockatansky, as he plays a far less active part in propelling the narrative arc. His character arc is instead supportive, as his inner battles and "madness" are his main preoccupations for ensuring his survival. Mad Max is largely lugged along, as Furiosa speeds through the Wasteland in her rig. Imperator Furiosa thrusts the momentum of the narrative arc into a continuous, manic desert chase, as she steals Immortan Joe's five wives, escaping from his dictatorial, tyrannical power under the guise of a mission to Gas

Town. She instead heads for the matriarchal Green Place, from where she originates. Immortan Joe and his War Boys give chase as his “stolen property” needs to be returned to his throne of rule, the Citadel. Mad Max and Furiosa have moments when they fight one another ferociously, but later rely on one another’s cunning and skills to survive the impending dangers of the Wasteland.

The overarching theme, as the director George Miller (2015:n.p.) explains, is survival, but other themes such as vengeance and solidarity are identified by film critics such as Scott (2015:n.p.). The theme of female empowerment is pointed out by Kit (2015:n.p.) as he writes “It [the film] handles themes of female empowerment without speeches or signs trumpeting its doing so, making the message all the more powerful.” Female empowerment is an unavoidable main concern of the film and it is an overt thematic exploration. George Miller consulted Eve Ensler, the writer of *Vagina Monologues*, as a requested for her to address the cast on set to elucidate the topic of violence against women (Dockterman 2015:n.p.). Ensler points out that violence against women in her lifetime, as it relates to racial and economic injustice, is resolutely addressed in *Mad Max: Fury Road* and he refers to the film as a feminist action film. (Dockterman 2015:n.p.).

The film begins with Mad Max, as he narrates the context of his madness and delusions. He symbolically crushes and eats a two-headed lizard, characterising him as a perpetual survivor in a wasteland of half-lives. He is captured by Immortan Joe’s War Boys, who transform him into a universal blood donor. Mad Max becomes a commodity and accessory, not only to the War Boys, but later, to an extent, to Imperator Furiosa. Furiosa refers to Mad Max as “Fool” when he negates a response to her query as to his identity. Mad Max does, however, save Furiosa’s life twice: he heroically transfers his blood to Furiosa after she is severely injured, and, secondly, directs her away from the deadly dangers of the wasteland. He instead guides her back to Immortan Joe’s Citadel, a safe-haven, and the ultimate conclusion to her mission. He does nevertheless distinctly, throughout the film, make way for Furiosa’s leadership and strategically directed undertaking to return to the Green Place.

Imperator Furiosa's rage and vengeance towards Immortan Joe's tyrannical power is shown through the "abduction" of his wives (also referred to as "breeders", "breeding stock" and "property"), from the biodome. They are retained in a secure area to produce healthy heirs for Immortan Joe's self-made tyrannical rule. Furiosa is the distinct leader of this female group, although the five wives— Capable, Cheedo, Toast, the Dag and the Splendid Angharad— show their stealth during the chase through the wasteland. They, for example, assist Furiosa with assembling and taking an inventory of the guns.

The determination of the five wives to escape from being sex slaves who are raped and impregnated in a vaulted enclosure as "property", is a valuable aspect of their inner strength. The wives actively support Furiosa's mission to join the Vuvalini in the Green Place of the Many Mothers, but with occasional relapse. Other scenes which show their fortitude include when Angharad places her pregnant body between Immortan Joe's gun and Furiosa, and Cheedo tricking Rictus (Immortan Joe's son) so Furiosa can kill Immortan Joe. The Five Wives ask questions such as, "Who Killed the World?" declaring, "We are not things", reiterating the escape from and questioning of patriarchal tyranny. The wives wear vagina dentata-like chastity belts, which they remove with bolt cutters and discard with disdain. A number of the Vuvalini die in the chase back to the Citadel, including one of the five wives Angharad, after Furiosa discovers that the Green Place of the Many Mothers has dried up and is non-existent.

Imperator Furiosa's final defeat of Immortan Joe transpires during a dramatic moment when his face is ripped off after she hooks his jaw with a harpoon attached to a revolving chain. The symbolic significance of this brutal defacement connotes the removal of the charade of Immortan Joe's power. His initial introduction, in contrast to his apparent power, reveals a decaying and festering body that is kept alive with a breathing apparatus. After his death, Furiosa returns to the Citadel, displaying his corpse on his truck (The Gigahorse), allowing the crowd to rip his body apart and feed off it in a final frenzy. Here Furiosa parts with Mad Max. As he disappears into the crowd, she gives him a slight but meaningful nod of recognition. The final scene alludes to her prospective leadership of the Citadel, but allows for an open-ended interpretation.



#### 4.4.2 The Furiosa Test: The Controversial Threat of Trojan Horse Feminism in *Mad Max: Fury Road*

In the context of popular online media gender tests, *Mad Max: Fury Road* manages to maintain its success, as it passed the Bechdel - Mako Mori test and recently created (Imperator) Furiosa test. Power (2015:n.p.) explains the simplicity of The Furiosa test by declaring, "It's a rather simple one, really: do people on the internet get mad about it [the film] being feminist?" Power (2015:n.p.) claims that *Mad Max: Fury Road* succeeds because it has "seven strong, great female characters that stand on their own and are not defined by men", so passing the Mako More Test. The film passes the Bechdel Test, because "at one point in the movie, there are twelve different, mostly identified female characters onscreen, and none of them are talking about a man" (Power 2015:n.p.). The idea that *Mad Max: Fury Road* passes the Furiosa Test shows a contemporary phenomenon of online anti-feminist indignation which needs consideration.

The cult-following of the *Mad Max* franchise responded with various online critiques, in particular to the feminist content of the film. Numerous responses stressed that Mad Max, the male protagonist, was not the motivational force driving the film's narrative arc, but Imperator Furiosa, a strong action woman. A blogger, Clarey (2015:n.p.), responded unfavourably towards this change of conventional procedure in *Mad Max: Fury Road*. In his online article *Why You Should Not Go See "Mad Max: Feminist Road"* he refers to Imperator Furiosa's dominant position as "Trojan Horse feminis[m]". Clarey (2015:n.p.) further states that "it was going to be a feminist piece of propaganda posing as a guy flick". Clarey (2015:n.p.) continues to show how feminism in Hollywood is regarded by some film audiences:

The real issue is not whether feminism has infiltrated and co-opted Hollywood, ruining nearly every potentially-good action flick with a forced female character or an unnecessary romance sub-plot to eke out that extra 3 million in female attendees. It has.

The threat of feminism and strong action females in films such as *Mad Max: Fury Road* is evidence of how strong action female characters have been neglected in 20<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood science fiction action films. Clarey's misgivings show

a complacent regard that indicates the dominant role of a strong action female is still viewed as atypical for a narrative arc in this genre. It, likewise, underlines the fact that various prejudiced notions are still prevalent in how viewers respond to feminism or strong action females in blockbuster films. Strong action female protagonists, who dominate the narrative arc of a science fiction action film, are regarded as “forced” and artificial, and an attempt to gain financial profits from a young feminist market.

The surprised response from feminist activist Eve Ensler (2015:n.p.) regarding the inclusion of Imperator Furiosa, and the other female characters as representative of female issues, is telling. It reiterates the lack of strong female characters; moreover, it emphasises the neglect of female representation in Hollywood film, as Ensler (2015:n.p.) states:

I read the script and was blown away. One out of three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime—it’s a central issue of our time, and that violence against women relates to racial and economic injustice. This movie takes those issues head-on.

The reactive responses, both of anti-feminist blogger Clarey, and feminist activist Eve Ensler, emphasise that the representation of strong action female characters in Hollywood such as Imperator Furiosa, are in need of development. It is not yet normative, and societal attitudes and responses are evidence of this marginal attempt at inclusion. Ensler (2015:n.p.) supports the inclusion of a strong female protagonist by stating that

If you look at this film from an objective point of view, women are equally capable of fighting. Women have equal desires. Women are independent and have agency over their own lives. They exist without men.

Her statement reiterates that feminism, as seen in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, is in her opinion a matter of basic gender equality.

The character construction of a protagonist such as Imperator Furiosa is, according to Bal, concretised by an essential set of traits. The representation of a character

develops with the repetition of particular characteristics of a protagonist, as well as the piling up of data. According to Bal (2009:126) it

also fulfills a function in the construction of an image. The accumulation of characteristics causes odd facts to coalesce, complement each other, and then form a whole: the image of the character.

The character traits and image of a strong action woman, as portrayed by Imperator Furiosa, resonate with what is regarded as a feminist character. She embodies the type of feminist character traits that elicits a strong response from both anti- and pro-feminists, both remarking differently on her screen-to-viewer effectiveness.

The presence of such strong female characters shows sporadic progressive growth in female representation in Hollywood film. According to cyberfeminist websites such as *Women and Hollywood* (2017:n.p.), annual infograms are demonstrative of this representational growth of strong female protagonists.

Condensed data is compiled from various research projects, such as the Centre for the Study of Women in Film, the 2017 Hollywood Diversity Report and Theatrical Market Statistics 2016. It states that “in the top 100 films in 2016, females comprised 29% of the protagonists. That is a 7% increase from 2015.” Although this statistical data represents female characters from various genres in 2016, it indicates that female characters such as Imperator Furiosa (2015) are contributing to the statistical increase of female representation in Hollywood film. Montpelier (2017: n.p.) also asserts that, irrespective of the marginal representation of female protagonists in films, “of the top 25 grossing films from 2006 – 2015, films with female protagonists grossed an average of \$126 million, compared to films with male protagonists, which grossed \$80.6 million. That’s nearly \$50 million in favour of women”. The financial statistics show that, irrespective of biased sentiment towards female protagonists who dominate the narrative arc of a film, the decision to have female protagonists as a substantial part of a film’s narrative arc is, in fact, highly profitable.

According to Montpelier (2017:n.p), the viewership of Hollywood films shows that “women account for 52% of moviegoers and buy 50% of the tickets”, and so it is sensible in terms of both financial acumen and gender equality to include

substantive female characters. *Mad Max: Fury Road*, for example, according to IMBD Box Office Mojo (2017), is ranked as the 21<sup>st</sup> highest domestic (USA) grossing film in 2015, bringing in, to date, a gross income of \$378, 858 340 in 3722 cinemas worldwide. How these female protagonists are represented across the board, however, in terms of their substance, needs to be continuously assessed.

The power of George Miller in the representation of female protagonists in *Mad Max: Fury Road* is shown in the responses of Ensler and blogger Clarey. His directorial decision to influence the film's narrative arc with a feminist agenda affected viewer experience and response. The narrative arc of *Mad Max: Fury Road* revolves largely around recapturing Immortan Joe's wives or sex-slaves, who are involuntarily held to produce a number of heirs. A feminist approach towards the well-being of women is shown when Imperator Furiosa predominantly accesses and drives the narrative arc, saving the five wives from rape and sex-enslaved incarceration.

George Miller's involvement of Eve Ensler in the production of the film assisted the female actors to present a sympathetic approach to their characters as victims of sex-trafficking. In a *Time* interview, Ensler (Dockterman 2015:n.p.) describes her advisory role as giving "perspective on violence against women around the world, particularly in war zones". Ensler comments that she regards George Miller as a feminist director, to the extent that he addresses female issues in a blockbuster format, which can reach a much larger audience than most female or feminist directors (3722 cinemas in total). The role of the director is therefore important in driving any feminist agenda, whether it is Trojan or not.

#### **4.4.3 Power relation between Imperator Furiosa and Mad Max's Character Arcs: Overt and Covert Dominance and Submission**

The power relation between Imperator Furiosa and Mad Max, and the consequent viewer response around this relation, can be considered against Foucault's analysis of power, and Mulvey's observations around feminism in film. The Furiosa test (2015:n.p.), "Do people on the internet get mad about it [the film] being feminist?"

is a reminder of how viewers relate to the narrative, and character arcs of the film, but in particular how they relate to power displays. Online responses to Furiosa as the main protagonist, and her overriding dynamic of the narrative arc as a power base, revealed aggravated reactions. As Mulvey (1978:111) had already stated over four decades ago, “the collision between feminism and film is part of a wider explosive meeting between feminism and patriarchal culture.” Online commentary and blogs discussing feminism in film as a “Trojan Horse” (Colbey 2015:n.p.) reiterates another of Mulvey’s (1978:111) observations:

Largely excluded from creative tradition, subjected to patriarchal ideology within literature, popular arts and visual representation, women had to formulate an opposition to cultural sexism and discover a means of expression that broke with an art that had depended, for its existence, on an exclusively masculine concept of creativity.

The unequivocal dominance of Imperator Furiosa’s character arc in *Mad Max: Fury Road*’s narrative arc challenges decades of masculine dominance of the narrative arc. George Miller’s feminist agenda transformed the customary male dominant Mad Max formula of the first three films of the Mad Max franchise. Mad Max was an established dominant presence in the previous three films’ narrative arcs, but the fourth film, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, placed him in a female-orientated and feminist power framework. The previous narrative arrangement, and consequently the expectation of viewers, was effectively disrupted. If Imperator Furiosa had a less powerful character arc which did not negotiate a large portion of the narrative arc, would the response have been in line with the previous films in the franchise? Mad Max previously dealt mainly with a female antagonist and female supporting roles, rather than a strong action female protagonist.

Is a strong action female character such as Imperator Furiosa responsible for, and the beginning of an answer to, the fulfilment of Mulvey’s (1978) comment:

On the one hand, there is a desire to explore the suppressed meaning of femininity, to assert a women’s language as a slap in the face for patriarchy, a polemic and pleasure in self-discovery combined. On the other hand, there is a drive to forge an aesthetic that attacks language and representation, not as

something naturally linked with the male, but rather as something that soaks up dominant ideology, as a sponge soaks up water.

The power relation between Furiosa and Mad Max is consequently a necessary step for feminist involvement in mainstream Hollywood film. The film's narrative arc is punctuated with authentically gender-orientated themes such as sex-trafficking and rape in war-struck regions, or in this instance, a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Ensler's (2015:n.p.) input necessitates the existence of gender equality in society, and through Miller as director, manages to communicate a form of authenticity around feminist issues, not only for Furiosa and the five wives of Immortan Joe, but for an entire female viewership.

The power relation between Furiosa and Mad Max is, however, not an unbalanced show of dominance, but a relationship which necessitates submission. Albeit that Furiosa primarily drives the narrative arc, Mad Max is immediately active whenever Furiosa is in need of support, falters or faces death. This combination of submission and dominance between Furiosa and Mad Max is cyclical. The power relation drives the narrative arc forwards, ensuring the momentum towards their collective goals: escape and survival. Foucault (2003a:29-30) reminds us that power functions and that individuals "are in a position to both submit and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays". Power, as Foucault claims, "passes through individuals".

The power relation between Mad Max and Furiosa shows evidence of this power relay, and a momentary handing over of power in the narrative arc may be necessitated. When Furiosa needs help with driving the truck, Mad Max willingly assists. They both save one another's lives in different scenes, giving of themselves as a form of submission, but inherently also of strength. When Furiosa saves Mad Max from being trampled by various vehicles, she loses her prosthetic arm, symbolically giving of herself in order to salvage his life. Similarly, when Furiosa is stabbed, and battling for her life due to severe blood loss and a collapsed lung, Mad Max does what is necessary to save her. He punches a hole in her ribcage and uses his blood donor equipment to transfer his blood to her, rescuing her from certain death. Dahl (1957:204) refers to a "connection" between individuals; without this connection, "no power relation can be said to exist". The connection between

Furiosa and Mad Max is not sought out deliberately; in fact, both protagonists attempt to kill one another at first. The connection is created through both protagonists' motivation: survival in the Wasteland, and escape from the War Boys. Their connection is confirmed in the final stage of the film's denouement, when they nod at one another, as a sign of recognition.

Power is not visible at all times, but it can be covert, but active in its apparent "passivity" or visual absence. Mad Max's character can be read as a man who has managed, through his own challenges and issues, to uphold a moral compass with an unseen principled grounding. Alternatively, he can be viewed as a desperate survivalist who takes flight from all the internal and external threats and eludes them to survive. In his desperation to escape his imminent insanity, visually portrayed through cameos of ghosts of people he couldn't rescue, including his child, Mad Max has the inert power of his convictions and principles. A few specific instances hint at this covert power that rests within Max, displayed in snippets which steer the narrative arc forward. One example of this is where Max fails to relay his name to Furiosa, upon which she calls him "Fool" as a substitute for his name. However, during her state of unconsciousness, where he saves her through a blood transfusion, he tells Furiosa, "Max. My name is Max." His power of survival could therefore be in hiding himself in his madness as a means of self-preservation. His madness thus, duplicitously, functions as a barrier between himself and a harsh, destructive wasteland; but, when he feels "safe", he can recall his identity and reveal himself without hindrance.

This covert power gives one reason to consider that Mad Max understands the role Furiosa plays in this part of his life. He allows her to take control as this pushes the narrative of his own survival forward. She is inadvertently responsible for his survival and that of the people trapped in the Wasteland. His understanding that Furiosa should be the dominant individual on this journey is the only sane option in a collapsed patriarchal system. Max therefore opens himself up to this solution, understanding the power of submission, and managing to fulfill his motivation and goal: to survive.

#### 4.4.4 The Revised Mako Mori Test: Emperor Furiosa's Character Arc and Power Distribution on the Narrative Arc (*Mad Max: Fury Road*)

Similarly to Mako Mori's character arc, Emperor Furiosa's character is not introduced until the start of the rising action. The exposition is just under six minutes, but it is wholly narrated by Mad Max. He gives the viewer a brief, but necessary, insight into his character and back-story, and the circumstances influencing the setting of the film. Emperor Furiosa has a brief one-liner, "We have become half-life", during the exposition, as part of the choir of voices (sounding like the Vuvalini) asking questions as to the state of affairs which led to the post-apocalyptic setting of the film.

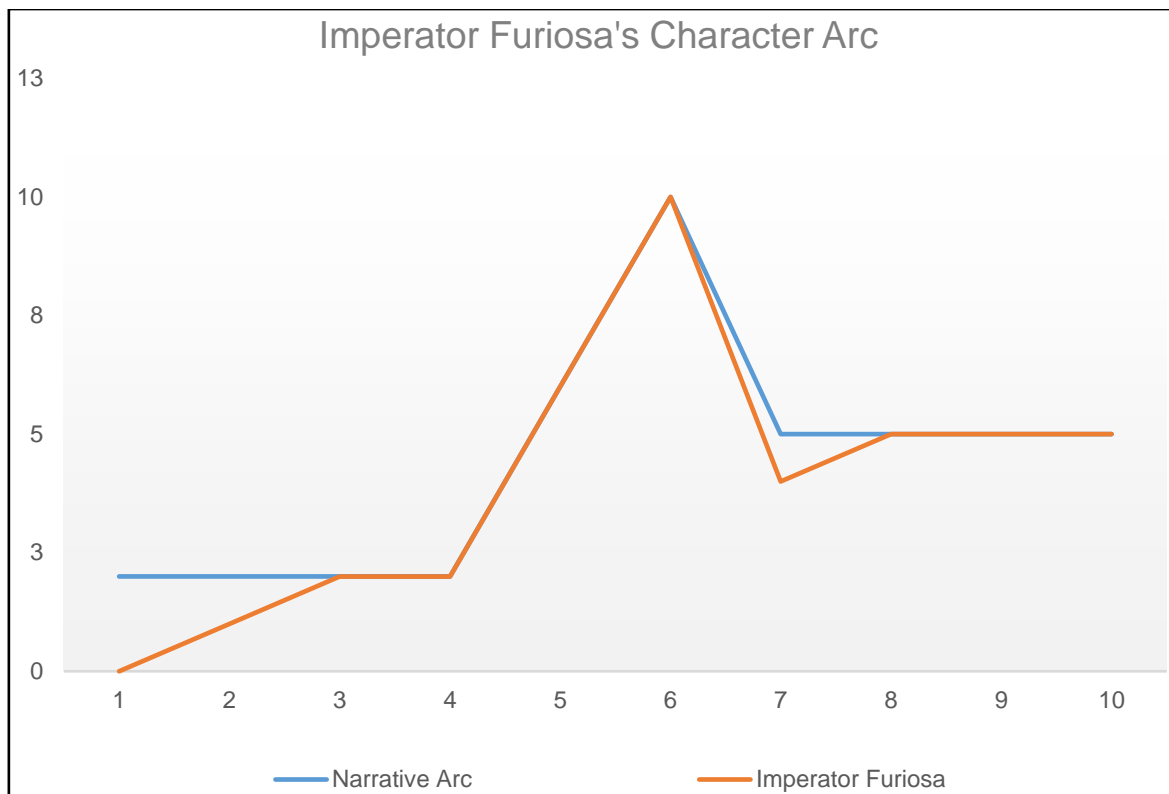
Although Mad Max is introduced as a first-person narrator in the exposition, he does not continue as the main protagonist for the duration of the film. Emperor Furiosa takes immediate charge of the narrative arc from the onset of the rising action. Mad Max is in a seized position during the rising action, with Emperor Furiosa negotiating his freedom from his shackles and face "shackle". She needs him for the purpose of working with her in fulfilling her mission of a journey to the Greenplace and escape from the Citadel.

EXPOSITION	ACT 1									
	Question 1 Is the character arc established?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 2 Is the character confronted by an inciting incident/ catalyst incident?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 3 Is the character confronted by a dramatic question?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 4 Is the character rising in action?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ACT 2	ACT 2									



	Question 5 Is the character attempting to resolve the problem initiated by the first turning point (Question 3)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 6: Is the character learning new skills, discovering her capabilities or have a raised self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
FALLING ACTION	ACT 3									
	Question 7: Does the character have a new sense of who she is becoming?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DENOUEMENT	Question 8: Is the character awakening and experiencing a higher level of self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 9: Has the character changed since the beginning (Question 1)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 10: Has the dramatic question been resolved by the character?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Diagram 4.3. The Revised Mako Mori Test: Imperator Furiosa's character arc and power distribution on the narrative arc (*Mad Max: Fury Road*)



**Diagram 4.4. Imperator Furiosa's character arc in relation to the narrative arc of *Mad Max: Fury Road***

Imperator Furiosa, irrespective of Mad Max occasionally fighting and shooting War Boys, is in full control of the narrative arc during the rising action and climax. Her character arc is the impetus propelling the rising action, with Mad Max willingly participating as required and requested, but he does not propel the narrative arc towards the climax.

Imperator Furiosa's character arc is accountable for the duration of the climax, as she kills the main antagonist, Immortan Joe, by ripping his face off, consequently overthrowing and defeating his domain and power. This occurs whilst Mad Max is fighting off the War Boys and overseeing the safety of the Wives, thus taking a secondary position in the narrative arc. Mad Max does, however, take full control of the falling action as Imperator Furiosa fights for her life, wherein Mad Max donates blood to save her. It isn't possible for Furiosa to reflect on her growth as a character during this period as she is rendered unconscious. It is also in this scene that Mad Max discloses his identity, reminding the audience of his presence and subliminal responsiveness. During the denouement he disappears into the crowd, giving

Imperator Furiosa and the Vuvalini full reign of the final part of the narrative arc. The implication of the women's return points to a systemic power shift, for which they take full responsibility.

Imperator Furiosa's character arc is, therefore, not introduced during the exposition, but takes full control of the narrative arc and climax, drops from the narrative arc during the falling action and gradually takes control of the narrative arc until the end of the denouement. Imperator Furiosa's narrative arc is arguably more prominent in relation to the narrative arc as, for example, Mako Mori's character arc has shown to be. One can argue that Imperator Furiosa, in comparison to Mako Mori, has more leverage as a strong action female character in driving the narrative arc and plot. Imperator Furiosa is also not as flanked by male protagonists, and independently takes control of her character arc and the narrative arc. In comparison, Mako Mori is in close relationship with the male protagonists in the narrative arc of *Pacific Rim*, awaiting their instructions and guidelines. Imperator Furiosa shows a more dominant presence on the narrative arc, thus empowering her character arc which, in turn, develops the plot of *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

## 4.5 ELLEN RIPLEY'S CHARACTER ARC IN *ALIENS*

### 4.5.1 Background and Fabula of *Aliens*

The second film in the *Alien* franchise, *Aliens* (1986), is a continuation of the 1979 film *Alien*, and shows a further developing character arc for the female protagonist, Ellen Ripley. The film commences when Ellen Ripley is found in a spacecraft, after fifty-seven years of crypto-sleep. She is questioned during a hearing as to her reasons for her destruction of an M-class spacecraft, the Nostromo, belonging to the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, a corporation she works for as a warrant officer. Her personal anecdote of her crew's alien encounter is disbelieved and she is submitted to a six month psychiatric evaluation for having "questionable judgement". She is later approached by Burke to serve as an advisor on another mission, to gauge why a sixty- to seventy-strong colony of Terraformers is not responding to communication from Weyland-Yutani. An attack from xenomorphs (aliens) is suspected. Weyland-Yutani is presented as a typical corporation, with

business interest and slogans such as “Building Better Worlds” in the background. Ripley is willing to take part in the mission on the firm condition that the agenda is solely to annihilate the aliens, with no further studies or return of any specimens.

The mission of the Sulaco, a newly introduced spacecraft, is made up of a crew of eight: Ellen Ripley (Warrant officer), Dwayne Hicks (a Corporal and Sergeant Apone’s second-in-command), Carter J. Burke (special projects director of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation’s Special Services Division), Bishop (an android executive officer assigned to the Sulaco), William Hudson (a Private), Scott Gorman (Commanding Officer), Vasquez (a Private and “smartgunner”) and Apone (Gunnery Sergeant and squad leader of the Colonel Marines). The marine crew is presented as “a squad of ultimate badasses” on a “bug hunt” by Hudson, but are clearly not fully aware of the danger of the aliens awaiting them. The crew’s psychologically inept preparation and poor comprehension of the true nature of their mission are evident from the start.

Ripley is at the outset portrayed as experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, waking up crying, having night-sweats, nightmares, and smoking substantially. She is determined to work through her previous ordeal, and works as a fork-lifter and loader with a Class 2 rating. Her determination to resolve her past extends to the point where she is eventually swayed by Burke’s offer to act as an advisor on the Sulaco mission to destroy the alien species. Initially, she does not fully participate, even walking with the crew unarmed, and although she advises the crew and gives some orders, she shows slight signs of anxiety and hesitance.

The Sulaco crew sweeps the LV-426 colonial station for any alien life and Terraformers, initially detecting nothing, other than a girl, Newt (Rebecca Jorden), who managed to hide away from the alien onslaught. The colonists’ PDTs (Personal Data Transmitters) are eventually detected in the lower levels of the station. The crew is partially wiped out as aliens attack them whilst searching for the colonists. Ripley, with great urgency, takes over command from a stupefied Gordon, the Sulaco commander, in an attempt to rescue the remaining crew. She hastily drives into the station and manages to rescue the crew, knowing that the others are already dead and being cocooned by the aliens

Ripley's suggestion to "nuke the entire site from orbit" is countered by Burke, arguing that the cost of all the equipment, the station and the equipment should not be destroyed. His ulterior motives are revealed when he traps Ripley and Newt in a room where two "facehuggers" from a laboratory attempt to impregnate them. Burke's plot to smuggle specimens past quarantine in order to partially breed the aliens for their blood, which is a powerful acid, is laid bare by Ripley. Burke is later killed in an alien attack alongside a few more members of the marine squad.

Ripley takes full charge of the remainder of the squad in coalition with Hicks, who teaches her how to use an M-41A Pulse Rifle. She lays out a strategy on how to escape the station, now crawling with deadly aliens on the attack. In yet another alien attack, during the crew's successful escape from the station, the aliens capture Newt, but Ripley rapidly returns to save her, with absolute determination. She stocks up on grenades and other weaponry on her return to the station, whilst a constant emergency siren warns of an impending self-destruct explosion in a mere nineteen minutes. Ripley manages to trace Newt, and in the process of rescuing her, lands up in a room where the alien queen is laying countless "facehugger" eggs. Whilst some aliens move towards her, Ripley negotiates with the queen, forcing her to send her alien forces into retreat, as she shows her that she will destroy the eggs with a flamethrower. As she escapes she destroys all the eggs with the flamethrower and a number of grenades, upon which the queen detaches from her laying-sack, angrily following Ripley in an elevator towards the upper levels of the station.

Bishop manages to pick up Ripley and Newt with a spacecraft, just before the queen launches an attack; however, as they reach the Sulaco, the queen appears from the spacecraft, ripping Bishop apart, and attempts to attack Ripley. Ripley manages to get into a loader suit and a physical battle with the queen ensues. She manages to get to a chute and opens the doors in an attempt to push the queen into outer space. The queen drags her through the chute, but Ripley manages to forcefully eject the queen just before Newt, as well as the remainder of Bishop and Ripley are pulled into space. The film ends with Ripley, Bishop and Newt lying in a crypto-pod, returning to Weyland-Yutani.

#### 4.5.2 Ripley as a Foundational Strong Action Superwoman (Strong Action Female)

The number of articles and books written around the character of Ellen Ripley, since the release of *Alien* (1979), establishes her as a pivotal and foundational strong female character, which has warranted a large body of research in the context of gender studies in film. Her character embodies second-wave feminist characteristics, the characteristics of a traditional male hero, and those of an action superwoman. Some of the second-wave feminist characteristics can be briefly described as “worlds free of sexism, worlds in which women’s contributions (to science) are recognised and valued, worlds that explore the diversity of women’s desire and sexuality, and worlds that move beyond gender” (2005:290).

Ripley manages to outperform and outlive crew after crew of mainly men, outsmarting the cunning and vicious attacks of myriads of alien creatures. She manages this through her traditional female characteristics, such as being nurturing and protective like a mother figure, but also having the cunning required to survive. The power shift and relation of Ripley’s character arc to the film’s narrative arc position her in an empowered and subjective status different from the general stereotypical female characters of the 1970s. Her initial unassuming, yet demanding onscreen presence allows for a dynamic character arc development, showcasing her physical and strategising skills. Ripley’s foresight and intuitive assessment of later problems and understanding of the nature of characters in the plot stand her in good stead. Her continuous growth in an assertive leadership position eventually drives the film’s narrative arc through her forceful, autonomous character arc.

A critical evaluation of an example of female characters from one of director Cameron’s later films, *Avatar* (2009), in comparison to his earlier films such as *Aliens* (1986), mentions Ellen Ripley as a pioneering figure who “rewrote the rules of who can and should be the lead in Hollywood action films” (Narminio & Kapell 2011:146). Dean Conrad (2011:130) writes that Cameron’s “Ripley embodies all that a woman can be—taking a path she chooses for herself”. This reiterates the

agency of her character, her subjective development and capacity to, as (Nesbitt: 21) states, “upstage masculine postures of identity”.

The introduction of a strong female action heroine such as Ellen Ripley has permutations where gender representation is concerned. How an action superwoman is read as a female character on screen, and in the context of gender and power relations in a narrative arc requires various considerations. Hills (1999:39) argues that a binary model of male/female renders the conceptualisation of the heroic female character difficult. Hills states that this is

because psychoanalytic accounts, which theorize sexual difference within the framework of linked binary oppositions (active male/passive female), necessarily position normative female subjectivity as passive or in terms of lack. From this perspective, active and aggressive women in the cinema can only be seen as phallic, unnatural or “figuratively male”.

Ellen Ripley’s strong character arc, which drives the narrative arc, can be viewed as making her role “masculine” rather than becoming a super action female. The knowledge that her role was initially written for a man does not assist in destigmatising her inherent strength as an action heroine, but as Poast (2012:n.p.) mentions’ “Scott developed the story of Ripley in order to alter, contest, and ultimately deconstruct filmic conventions that maintained the strict division of power between the sexes.” Ripley’s character is, as Poast (2012:n.p) states, “unsexualized” or even androgynous, fluctuating between a stereotypical feminine and masculine orientation as the need arises. This radical move of gender-swapping in the 1970s classical Hollywood cinema allows Ripley’s character to be embedded in various gender constructs, surging dichotomies, and even gender binaries.

Hills (1999:39) proposes that Ripley is best understood as moving beyond the restrictive gender dichotomy and is what she refers to as a transgressive character (moving to the extremes of both male and female characteristics) who functions not in terms understood as male or female but as a transcendent and progressive character. Brown (2005:69) refers to Ellen Ripley as a “dominatrix”, “...not as a

kinky subcultural fetish but as a complex symbol that combines and exploits power (both physical and social) along the axis of gender (both masculine and feminine).” Over the extent of the four films, *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986), *Alien 3* (1992) and *Alien Resurrection* (1997), Ellen Ripley’s gender construct is in continuous flux, not relating to one precise characteristic of either a masculine or feminine nature. As Poast (2012:n.p) points out, in *Aliens* Ellen Ripley fluctuates between genders, as the film is

masculinising Ripley,...[but]...paradoxically works to feminise its protagonist by reprioritising her motivations toward motherhood, an institution that many feminists have argued reinforces the woman’s subservient position in patriarchal society.

Whichever lens Ellen Ripley’s character is viewed through in *Aliens*, her gender fluctuation is evident throughout her character arc. Irrespective of how she embodies the equivalent strengths of feminine and masculine traits during the course of her character arc, she uses these traits not only to survive and lead, but also to nurture and protect, showing a multiplicity to her character which makes her a conclusive survivor and gender shape-shifter.

#### **4.5.3 Power Relations between Ripley and the Male Team Members’**

##### **Character Arcs: The Corporate Collective**

Ellen Ripley is a female protagonist enveloped by the structure of a corporation, rather than countered by an exacting male protagonist. Weyland-Yutani Corporation is, according to Fandom Wikia (2017:n.p.), “... a modern example of the longstanding trope of the evil mega-corporation in science fiction.” The collective of males in the film, as a result of being employed by the corporation, form a union with various faces and facets, as a male counterpart for Ellen Ripley as the sole female protagonist.

Ellen Ripley as employed by the corporation, nonetheless, in the film *Aliens*, stands “outside” of the corporation. The corporation firstly subject her to a disciplinary hearing, administers psychiatric treatment and psychiatric observation for six



months, demotes her from her position as a warrant officer and finally strips her of her flyer's license. Another distinguishing trait of her character's position in the corporation's framework is that she continuously informs the corporation about the exact truth regarding the aliens but, as she states in her own words, they are "not listening to me." Ellen Ripley is the voice of reason, but is shunned and disregarded from the onset, which creates a simmering charge of conflict, setting up the momentum of the film's narrative arc. This conflict of delayed spoken truth is but one aspect that feeds into the narrative arc.

Ellen Ripley's character arc is also reliant on the unfulfilled promise she made towards her daughter, but has not been able to realise. Ripley functions as an advisor for the corporation, but she is further driven by her need to fulfill her motherly duty, by rescuing Newt from the aliens, but also destroying the mother alien in the process. The main theme of the film becomes feminine in principle, as the corporation's power during the mission rapidly disintegrates. The corporation is for all technical purposes toppled by Ripley's completion of her character arc, which is in full unison with the narrative arc throughout the film.

The theme of a corporation that creates space colonies becomes a mother versus mother scenario, not only in creation, but as a reflection of authentic leadership. The corporation has a fragmented capacity for true leadership, whereas Ripley must, as a matter of principle and pure survival, take over the leadership role. Since she is the only character temperate enough to understand the full extent of the mission, she moves beyond the constrictions of the superimposed role she was given and exposes her full character wholly to the narrative arc. Ellen Ripley's character arc is in part that of a mother-figure fulfilling her role as a care-taker and care-giver, and in part an assurance of the tangible survival of the human species. In the process, she outstrips the continuous extension of corporate power and realises that true survival and life exist only in the destruction of that which the corporation seeks to create. Her power does not stand in relation to a singular male protagonist, but to the multi-faceted complexities of a male collective. Despite the collective power structure, her character arc is the dominant entity.

In effect, the corporation, with its masculine dynamism of probing space in order to colonise it, is in direct opposition to what Ellen Ripley regards as humanity's sustainability and survival. Ironically, her promotion of humanity's survival lies in the destruction of what the corporation regards as progress, namely the discovery and experimentation with alien forces. Ellen Ripley's super action female characters, similarly to those of Imperator Furiosa, also questions, in a very determined approach, the efficacy of male exploration. Both characters prefer to draw the focus back to the protection of the fragility of humanity, and the care necessary to ensure actual survival. Progress, from Ellen Ripley's vantage point, is not necessarily colonising alien territories, but rather the maintenance of what is given, and already in existence. Added to that, she shows that accountability lies in authentic leadership, and the execution of promises made, and not, as in the instance of Burke, "promises" made as a charade to ensnare innocent people for the sake of the corporation.

Ellen Ripley's power relation with the male collective or corporation reiterates how the over-reaching effects of a continuously exerting patriarchal system is, in itself, a destructive force. Her character arc brings equilibrium and assures humanity's survival, thus completing the dramatic question in an ironically destructive mode. Ripley's character is a required counterpart to the over-reaching power structures of the corporation. Her role as a mother and leadership figure demands a dual result: the sincere care of humanity, and the destruction of over-extending corporations, thus a delicate equilibrium of survival.

#### **4.5.4 The Revised Mako Mori Test: Ellen Ripley's Character Arc and Power Distribution on the Narrative Arc (*Aliens*)**

Ellen Ripley does not have an accidentally strong character arc, nor is it by chance that her character arc is in perfect unison with the narrative arc of the film (Figure 4). The primary reason for this is that her character was originally scripted for a male protagonist and only later changed to a female protagonist by director Ridley Scott. As Gallardo & Smith (2004:9) state,

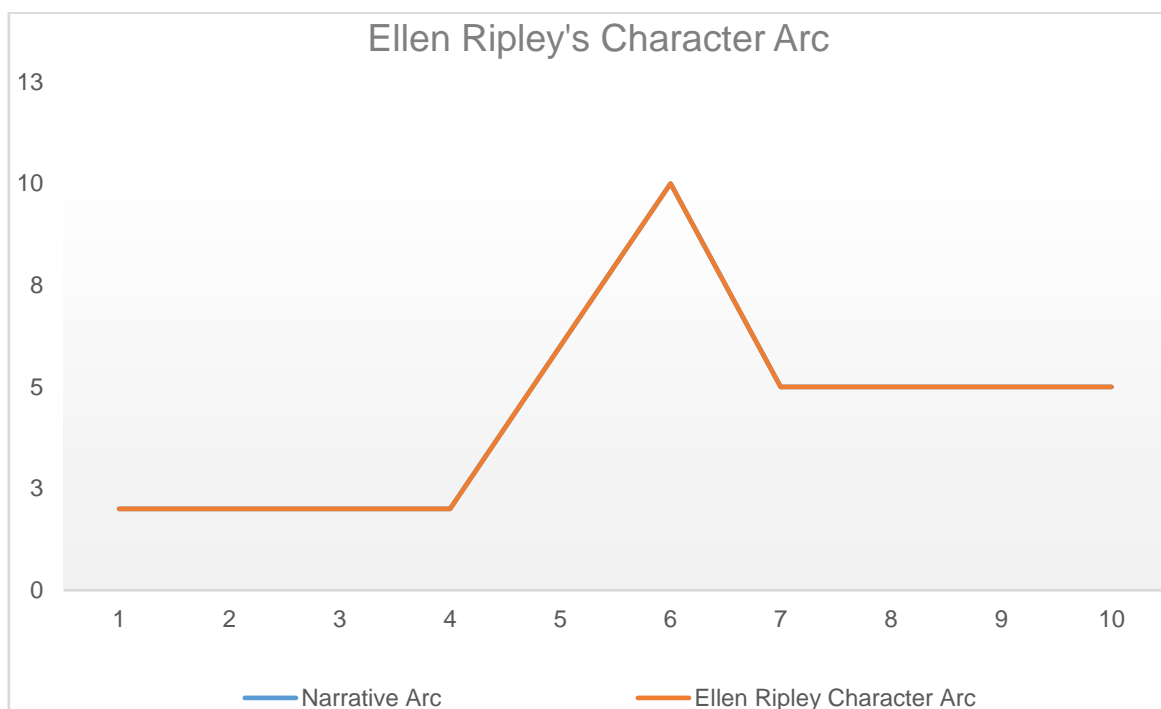
By conflating the typical male hero of science fiction with the female survivor of slasher films, *Alien* became the first science fiction film in which a female (rather than a male) represented humanity, effectively destabilizing gender difference.

Analysing Ellen Ripley's character arc in this gender-swapping context reiterates the complex nuances created by gender representation in film, and reflects on the necessity of continuously querying gender politics in popular media and film.

EXPOSITION	ACT 1									
	Question 1: Is the character arc established?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 2: Is the character confronted by an inciting incident/ catalyst incident?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 3; Is the character confronted by a dramatic question?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 4: Is the character rising in action?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RISING ACTION & CLIMAX	ACT 2									
	Question 5: Is the character attempting to resolve the problem initiated by the first turning point (Question 3)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 6: Is the character learning new skills, discovering her capabilities or have a raised self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
FALLING ACTION	ACT 3									
	Question 7: Does the character have a new sense of who she is becoming?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DENOUEMENT	Question: 8 Is the character awakening and experiencing a higher level of self-awareness?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

	Question 9: Has the character changed since the beginning (Question 1)?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Question 10: Has the dramatic question been resolved by the character?									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Diagram 4.5 The Revised Mako Mori Test: Ellen Ripley's character arc and power distribution on the narrative arc (*Aliens*)**



**Diagram 4.6 Ellen Ripley's character arc in relation to the narrative arc of *Aliens***

Female characters playing male roles or similar roles are still instilled with problematic degrees of reference towards feminism and female character roles. For example, Poast (2012:n.p.) refers to Ellen Ripley's character as a "wolf in sheep's clothing", similar to the term "Trojan Horse Feminis[m]" coined by Clarey (2015:n.p.) with reference to Imperator Furiosa, where he insists that "...this is the Trojan Horse feminists and Hollywood leftists will use to (vainly) insist on the trope [that] women are equal to men in all things." Poast (2012:n.p.) also refers to the term "bait-and-switch" when he mentions that

Instead of overtly disrupting the conventional order of Hollywood by maintaining Ripley as the hero throughout (which could have been easily dismissed), Scott decided to subtly pepper insinuations of Ripley's mastery over the narrative

after establishing a “dummy” protagonist (equivalent to the cinematic bait-and-switch).

Ellen Ripley’s character placement in a male role, as can be seen in Figure 3, shows how a male character arc (or female character arc created from a male character arc) could read, albeit here played by a strong action female character. But, 21<sup>st</sup> century commentary around strong action female characters shows how strong female characters still need to literally fight for recognition and a position on the narrative arc in film. Even since Ellen Ripley’s role, the positioning of strong action female characters is still complex and problematic.

One cannot detract from the powerful presence and skill-set portrayed by Sigourney Weaver in depicting the character, Ellen Ripley, as a ground-breaking action female heroine. Notwithstanding the fact that the context of gender-swapping is relevant, her character shows important female traits and predispositions which irrespectively point towards her effectiveness as a strong action female. Ripley’s back-story is appropriately explored in the exposition and full focus is given to her character from the onset of the film. During the exposition and rising action she is seen defending her actions during a disciplinary hearing, and she is portrayed as an advisor during the rising action.

One could query her capacity as a strong character since, despite her role as a knowledgeable and experienced advisor, no one heeds her wisdom and knowledge. This however does not reflect on her as a weak character, but a simmering strong one, allowing in hope, the corporation and navy seals to prove themselves worthy of the mission. This is not the case, as all the characters in command of the mission either falter, die or prove themselves insufficient to lead and follow through. Ripley is, as a matter of necessity, required to act beyond her marginal role as advisor. She acts, possibly out of pure survival instinct, but she is an indisputable natural leader who finds it impossible to be contained in alarmingly dangerous situations. She responds to all challenges with immediate leadership and control, exuding all her agency.

Ellen Ripley is solely responsible for taking gradual, but necessary control of the rising action. She is thereafter entirely responsible for the climax, as she ejects the mother alien into space, similarly to her actions towards the alien in *Alien* (1979). As a protagonist, she once more takes a high power position in the film, with no other characters opposing or assisting her during the climactic scene. This is so since they are all either deceased (most of the crew), damaged (Bishop the android) or injured (Corporal Dwayne Hicks was injured by acidic alien blood).

The falling action and denouement of the film is barely a minute long, but shows how Ripley caringly looks after the remainder of the survivors. In the falling action and denouement, Ellen Ripley is seen fulfilling the initial inciting incident (the death of her daughter) as part of the dramatic question she faces. The fulfillment of the dramatic question is evident through Ellen Ripley's caring response towards the remainder of the crew, and her protection of Newt. The girl calls Ellen Ripley "Mommy" just after she ejects the mother alien into space, indicating the fulfillment and completion of her character arc in *Aliens*. The question of a caring mother is thus completed, and the compensation for not fulfilling her promise of a safe return to her own daughter is accomplished.

Ellen Ripley's character arc is therefore in complete unison with the narrative arc of *Alien*, showing conclusively that her character arc is responsible for driving the narrative arc and plot. She takes it towards a resolved dramatic question, irrespective of the collective corporation that encircles her from the start of the exposition. It would be fair to consider that a collective, powerful corporation would be commanding enough to defeat the alien onslaught. However, once again, as in *Alien*, it is Ellen Ripley who manages to complete the narrative arc. She does so not only by surviving, but by bringing the narrative to filmic closure through the strengths and skills of her character arc. Ellen Ripley is, in many ways to this day, a poignant female protagonist, as she owns and develops the narrative arc of the film. For this reason, she is still regarded and proves to be a benchmark foundational strong action female character.

## 4.6 CONCLUSION

The power dynamics between female and male protagonists, when scrutinised from a character arc/ narrative arc interplay, show prevalent gender structures, and are evidence of how the female's power is represented. Although a nominal sample of three films have been used, it has been clearly demonstrated how the female protagonists have varying levels of agency in their consecutive films. The discussion around and the analysis of the narrative arc as a power base, together with the proximity of the character arc to the narrative arc, support these findings. The sliding scale of narrative arc-proximity (Diagrams 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5) in the Revised Mako Mori Test, links with the literary exploration of the female protagonists, showing the visual results (Diagrams 4.2, 4.4 and 4.6) in accordance with how the ten questions in the questionnaires (Diagrams 4.1, 4.3 and .4.5) have been answered.

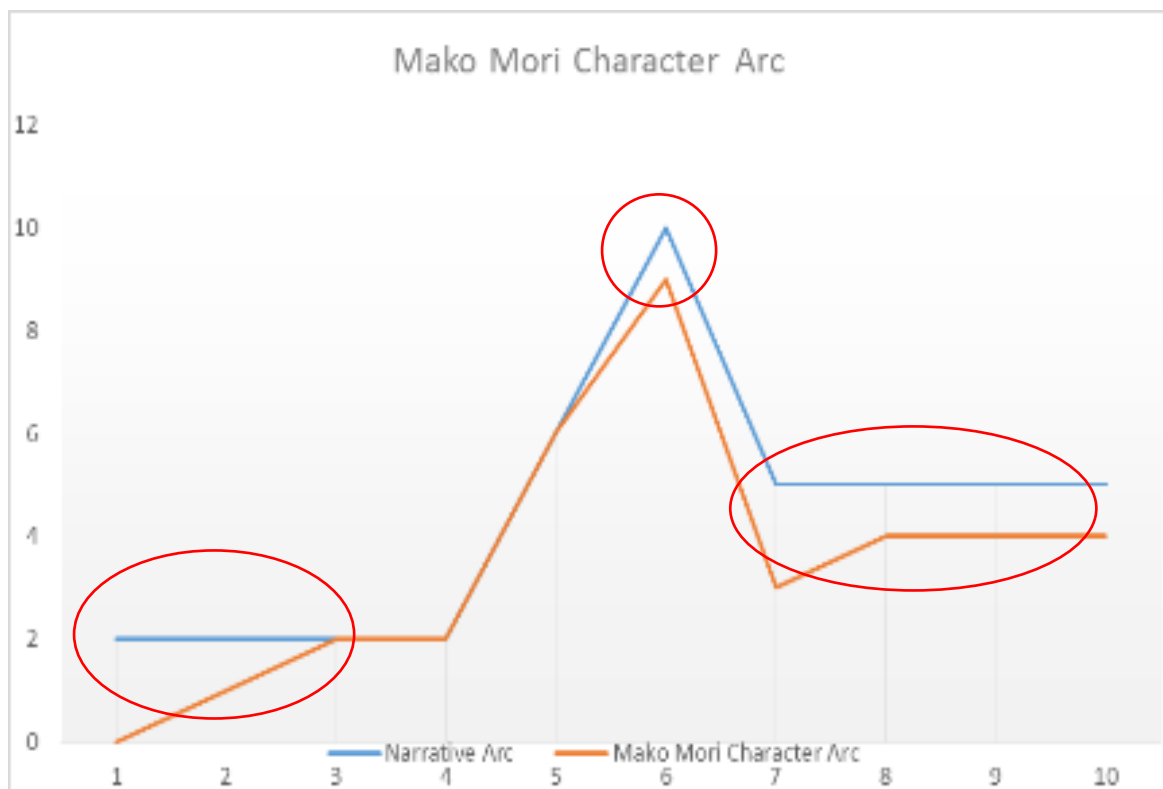
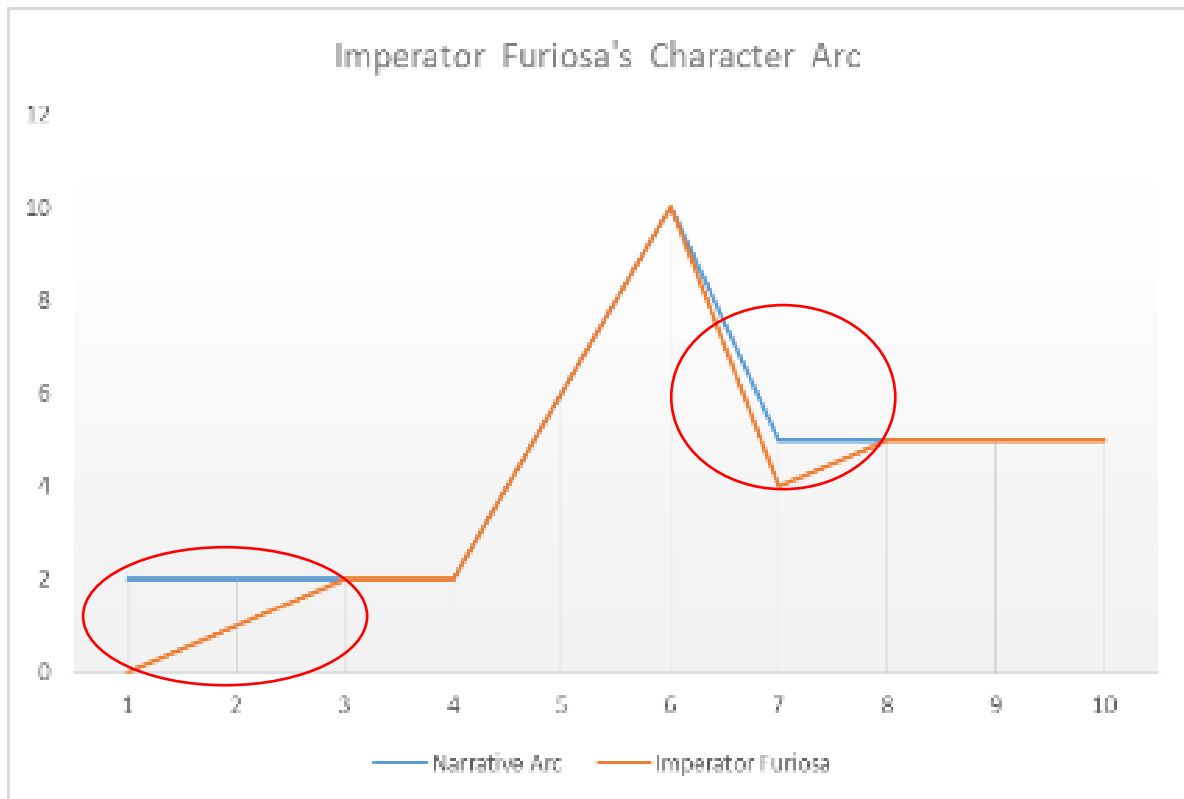
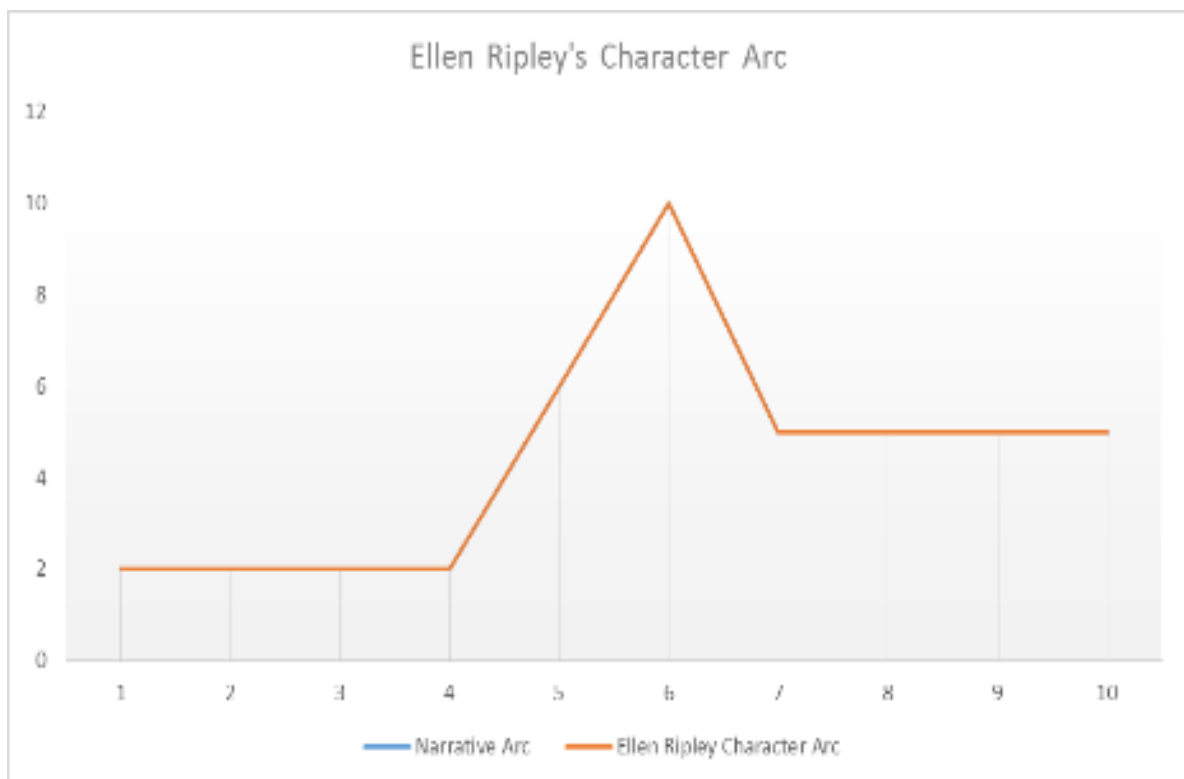


Diagram 4.7. Mako Mori's character arc specificities



**Diagram 4.8. Imperator Furiosa's character arc specificities**



**Diagram 4.9. Ellen Ripley's character arc specificities**



A comparison of the three female protagonists in *Aliens*, *Pacific Rim*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, through Revised Mako Mori Tests, indicates noticeable contrasts and similarities. Mako Mori's exposition (Figure 4.7) looks similar to that of Imperator Furiosa's (Figure 4.8), as neither of these two female protagonists is introduced at the beginning of the film's narrative arc. This is so since the male protagonists' character arcs are introduced first. This can be viewed from two angles: 1) either as a matter of the male being regarded as a more primary character, or 2) as a bait-and-switch method, where the male protagonist is used to lure the audience into the feminist agenda.

In the case of Mako Mori, the result shows that the male protagonist has more power on the narrative arc. Imperator Furiosa is introduced after *Mad Max* has completed his introductory narrative exposition as a bait-and-switch method. In the instance of Imperator Furiosa's character arc, *Mad Max* is used as "exposition-bait", whereafter she takes immediate charge of the narrative arc onwards. Furiosa does, similarly to Mako Mori, lose traction during the falling action and partially during the denouement, as Furiosa is unconscious during this section. Mako Mori loses traction with the falling action as she is jettisoned from the Jaeger and does not drive the falling action or exposition.

The climaxes for both these female protagonists differ, as Imperator Furiosa owns the climax and she kills the main antagonists, whereas Mako Mori is impartially removed prior to what could have been a shared battle victory. The two male protagonists share the victory in this area instead.

Comparing Ellen Ripley's character arc to both Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa's arcs shows a different type of comparison, since Ellen Ripley's whole character arc is in unison with the narrative arc. Her character arc is continuously driving the narrative arc, albeit the fact that the corporation and crew do not listen to her counsel. She is responsible for an underlying current of tension and conflict, but also for the only logic and sound reasoning throughout the film. She is therefore, in comparison to Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa, continuously responsible for driving the narrative arc, and in fact, escalates the action to fever-pitch, ending by achieving her goals.

Mako Mori's character arc shows the least power, in comparison to either Ellen Ripley's or Imperator Furiosa's. In the context of the intersectional history of American-Japanese female protagonists in film it is a necessary power growth, but with substantial room for agency development. Imperator Furiosa's character arc proximity to the narrative arc, on the other hand, can hypothetically be ascribed to the bait-and-switch scenario and how the main protagonists are positioned in the film's narrative arc.

The Revised Mako Mori Test, therefore, shows visual evidence of the female protagonist's representation through a character arc that shows relevant power relations to the narrative arc. All three selected female protagonists are shown to be indispensable in moving the narrative and plot of the film forward.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to investigate the method in which female characters are represented in Hollywood film, using an explorative, descriptive and quantitative approach. As such, it was focused on the analysis of the character arcs of the female characters in three mainstream Hollywood films, namely *Pacific Rim*, *Aliens*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road* as measured through the Revised Mako Mori Test. Foucault's theory of power as a relation, through the framework of narratology (Bal 2009), afforded a point of departure for this exploration and analysis. The Revised Mako Mori Test was utilised through reference to cyberfeminism as a delineation. The digital humanities furthermore added to the demarcation of a contextual platform that presented a relevant consideration of gender inequity in Hollywood films.

Chapter 2 provided a literary overview of the theoretical underpinnings that concretised the concepts and analytical tools. The pertinent concepts and theoretical discourse explored were feminist gender studies, power theory, cyber platforms (cyberfeminism), measurability in feminism, narratology and spectator theory. This analytical chapter considered how narratology and power theory informed particular popular gender media tests on cyber platforms. The female protagonist's character arc is a location of agency, which was examined in terms of power relations and hierarchies throughout the analytical chapters. Narratology and power relations were interwoven as relevant criteria for the analysis of female representation in film through popular media gender tests. Public participation in gender studies was discussed as an indication of spectator theory at work, and as part of the influence of female representation on audience perception. Audience response was considered in the analytical chapters as a direct result of discourse and concepts such as measurability in gender studies, power theory and spectator theory.

Some pertinent issues that were mentioned are measurability in the feminist movement, an understanding of the protracted progress with gender equity in Hollywood, and the necessity for intersectional development. It can be concluded that cyberfeminism is an applicable discourse to also quantifiably assess gender equity in Hollywood film. The Internet can furthermore be regarded as a space for political awareness and analysis of gender equity in film through popular media tests. Lastly, the amalgam of theoretical analysis and audience participation is an effective system for informed gender equity awareness.

In Chapter 3 the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test from the Bechdel Test as a gender media test was examined. The origin of the suggested Mako Mori Test was discussed to show the process and purpose of the test towards a revised and further developed version. Other online popular media tests were also considered, to demonstrate how public participation in gender media tests manifest in cyberspace. Problematic aspects of popular media tests such as the Bechdel Test were also discussed, and analysed as a relevant framework for the original Mako Mori Test.

The prominence of narratology in the Mako Mori Test was discussed and shown as a pivotal underpinning for the development of a theoretical framework for this popular media test. Emphasis was placed on the original suggestion of a female character with her own narrative arc (or character arc) as an integral part of the Mako Mori Test. This suggestion necessitated the integration of a narratological framework in the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test. One of the differences between the Mako Mori Test and the Revised Mako Mori Test was naming the female protagonist's narrative arc as a character arc instead. Another difference was the development of the Revised Mako Mori Test as a measurable test with theoretical substance.

The focal point, after the construction of the test, was to assess the agency of the female character, which was done through observing the proximity of the female protagonist's character arc to the film's narrative arc. The consequent result was that this proximity would be an indicator of the female protagonist's agency throughout the film's narrative arc. The proximity would finally show that the

narrative arc of a film functions as a power base through which the female character's agency would be measured.

In Chapter 4 the origins of the strong female trope in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were discussed as, in part, laying a foundation for feminist film criticism through female character categorisation. The strong female character was also considered as a specific category that relates to a translation of female agency and subjectivity. The selection of either post-apocalyptic or science fiction strong female characters furthermore showed a relation to the potentiality of female agency against a dislodged patriarchal system.

The meaning of the male-female semantic axes was considered by looking at the characters' relations in *Pacific Rim*, *Aliens*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. The male-female protagonists' relations were analysed to assess how the power contributions and hierarchies of both parties affected the meaning of each character's position. Although Mako Mori and Raleigh Beckett (*Pacific Rim*), and Imperator Furiosa and Mad Max (*Mad Max: Fury Road*) create a semantic axis, Ellen Ripley (*Aliens*) was regarded in relation to a corporate collective of mostly male characters. This assessment was first approached as a quantitative analysis, and consequently each female character was filtered through the Revised Mako Mori Test as a qualitative assessment. The measurements used were a questionnaire which fed its results into a visual diagram. The diagram visually illustrated, through the proximity of the female protagonist's character arc to the narrative arc of the film, the level of agency the female character embodied.

The overall diagram analysis of the selected three female characters showed variants in the similarities and differences in how their character arcs relate to the narrative arcs. The comparisons showed that, with an analysis using the Revised Mako Mori Test, the power trajectory of a female character can be observed through a graphic visual. Ellen Ripley shows a constantly embedded character arc on the narrative arc, whereas Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa show on-and-off proximity variants. Both Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa show bait-and-switch expositions, in particular, Imperator Furiosa. All three female characters were however fully

engaged on the rising action trajectory, but Mako Mori dropped off prior to reaching the climax of the narrative arc.

The climax was shown as a pinnacle point in the development of the female character's agency, as full engagement in this section of the narrative arc showed substantive agency. Both Mako Mori and Imperator Furiosa are disengaged in the falling action, with Imperator Furiosa partially attaining a demanding presence in the denouement. However, Mako Mori does not attain the same position, making her the least substantive character if compared to both Ellen Ripley and Imperator Furiosa. The analysis of three female protagonists through the Revised Mako Mori Test gave a visual interpretation of quantitative observations.

In closing, the Revised Mako Mori Test as a popular media gender test demonstrated how the narrative arc of the film functions as a power base for character development. The proximity of a female protagonist to the narrative arc could visually elucidate this principle. The development of the Revised Mako Mori Test made use of a theoretical framework. The selection of strong science fiction female protagonists showed its workability, and consequent results.

This thesis contributes to the body of feminist film theory research through the composite of a foundational theoretical framework and a popular media gender test format. It further contributes a measurable format which can be utilised as an assessment guideline in an online platform. The Revised Mako Mori test contributes as a gender equity awareness mechanism. Gender bias is still a problematic issue in the Hollywood industry and continues to afflict the representation of females in film. This popular media gender test is thus relevant as a means to determine whether a female character is represented with a focal consideration on her agency. An online format of this popular media test can further be populated through public participation.

Areas for possible further research can include the public participation component which could function as cyberfeminist awareness and educational engagement. The development of the Revised Mako Mori Test would consequently rely on public input, which could determine the strengths and weakness of the test, and populate

information on a larger selection of films. A comparative study could also be implemented in order to illustrate the character arcs of intersectional female characters. This form of film analysis is not limited to gender equity studies and can be further extended to explicate how feminism is impacting on the Hollywood industry.

The cultural implications of screening films through the testing grounds of the Internet for gender equity checks highlight a few considerations. If a wider accessibility to the Internet can be established, more voices can be added to this manner of engaging with female representation in film. Marginalised females could consider developing similar popular media tests, for example in Bollywood and Hollywood, as a means to raise awareness as part of their cultural media studies. The Internet serves as a platform which allows accessibility to different cultures, and bespoke gender equity checks can bring international awareness to different sets of female representation.

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